MASTER'S THESIS

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BASED ON A PARADIGM

An Exegesis for a Masters of Philosophy (Screenwriting)
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By

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ABSTRACT

This exegesis investigates the process of screenwriting for feature films, and in particular, science fiction films. It asks the question: can screenwriting templates, or 'principles of feature film screenwriting', as found in the multitude of "how to write a screenplay" books, and scholarly works that have been published in the last forty years, actually help a screenwriter craft a 'better' screenplay; a screenplay that meets the requirements of investors, producers, and audiences alike?

To do this, I first examine many of the more popular, highly reviewed, and well-regarded screenplay writing books, and scholarly publications. I then examine ten examples of science fiction films – successful and unsuccessful; high budget and low-budget – to see if those films are consistent with the idea that the basic principles of successful screenplay construction correlate with commercial success in this particular genre.

This research is then combined with concepts originally formulated by Joseph Campbell, Sigmund Freud, and Constantin Stanislavski, to develop a step-by-step plan for each stage of the screenwriting process.

Finally, this development plan is tested by using it as the basis for the creative work associated with this exegesis – the writing of a screenplay for a low-budget science fiction film called *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* - from its original idea through to a Third Draft ready to present to the marketplace in order to seek production finance.

INTRODUCTION

The Literature Review

In his book "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting" (1979), Syd Field articulates what he considers the "ideal paradigm" for the screenplay of a successful Hollywood film. Using *Chinatown* (Director: Roman Polanski, Screenwriter: Robert Towne, 1974) as his primary example, he states that a clearly defined three-act structure is the most effective way to engage an audience in a feature film. This involves a First Act (or "set-up") for the first 25% of the screenplay, which includes a "Plot Point" at the end that leads to the Second Act (or "confrontation") for the next 50% of the screenplay, during which the protagonist repeatedly struggles to achieve a particular goal. Another "Plot Point" at the end of the Second Act then leads to the Third Act (or "resolution") and the final 25% of the screenplay in which the protagonist finally reaches (or does not reach) his or her goal.

This paradigm quickly became the blueprint for new screenwriters wishing to write a mainstream film, as well as being adopted by emerging script editors and producers as a guide for shaping a feature film screenplay during its development stage.

"The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers & Screenwriters" (Christopher Vogler, 1992) takes Joseph Campbell's monomyth theories in "The Hero With A Thousand Faces" (Campbell, 1949) and adapts them to construct a more detailed template for the successful screenplay. This consists of twelve distinct stages of the "Hero's Journey". The three-act structure still applies, but Vogler proposes additional clearly defined stages within each act. Throughout his book, Vogler analyses *The Wizard of Oz* (Director: Victor Fleming, Screenwriters: Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf, 1939), as well as other commercially successful Hollywood films such as *Star Wars* (Director & Screenwriter: George Lucas, 1977), *An Officer and a Gentleman* (Director: Taylor Hackford, Screenwriter: Douglas Day Stewart, 1982) and *Beverly Hills Cop* (Director: Martin Brest, Screenwriter: Daniel Petrie Jr., 1984).

Since the publication of "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting", there have been a large number of other books proposing a set of principles, or guides, that writers should follow in order to write a successful screenplay. A few of the more well-regarded ones include "Making A Good Script Great" by Linda Seger (1987), "How To

Write A Movie in 21 Days" by Viki King (1988), "Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting" by Robert McKee (1997), "Save The Cat! The Last Book on Scriptwriting You'll Ever Need" by Blake Snyder (2005), and "The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller" by John Truby (2007).

The Paradigm and Science Fiction Films

In the literature, the commercially successful films most frequently referred to as having screenplays that fit the above paradigm are *The Wizard of Oz*, *Chinatown*, *Star Wars*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Director: Steven Spielberg, Screenwriter: Melissa Mathison, 1982), *Witness* (Director: Peter Weir, Screenwriters: Earl W. Wallace and William Kelley, 1985), and *Tootsie* (Director: Sydney Pollack, Screenwriters: Larry Gelbart and Murray Schisgal, 1982). Each of these films was produced and/or distributed by a major Hollywood studio (MGM, Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures and Columbia Pictures respectively), marketed to mainstream audiences, and made with high production budgets. According to Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com), and using a US Inflation Calculator (www.usinflationcalculator.com), the production budgets for these films in today's dollars are estimated to be: US$49 million for *The Wizard of Oz*, US$26 million for *Chinatown*, US$44 million for *Star Wars*, US$26 million for *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, US$27 million for *Witness*, and US$52 million for *Tootsie*.

At the other end of the filmmaking spectrum are low-budget feature films which are produced independently of the Hollywood studio system, and aimed at either arthouse or "indie" audiences. Budgets for these films are usually below US$1 million, and most of the films made on these budgets are not released in cinemas, either going straight to DVD or disappearing completely (according to the Statistical Year Book 2017 published by the British Film Institute, only 14% of the 1,556 U.K. films shot between 2003 and 2014 with a budget of less than £500,000 (approx. US$700,000) were released theatrically in the U.K. or internationally (Page 98)). Occasionally, however, one of these low-budget films breaks out and becomes a huge commercial success, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Directors and Screenwriters: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) with a production budget of US$60,000 and a worldwide box office gross of US$248 million (www.boxofficemojo.com).

Within each of these budget areas a distinction can be made between "high concept" films and "low concept" films. In "Storytelling in the New Hollywood" (1999), Kristin Thompson describes a "high concept" film as one with an easily pitched, pithy

idea or premise, which is easy to market, whereas “low concept” films primarily focus on character and theme, and have stories that aren’t easily summarized in one short sentence. (Page 3)

Examples of films with an easily pitched, pithy premise, include *Jurassic Park* (Director: Steven Spielberg, Screenwriters: Michael Crichton and David Koepp, 1993) (What if scientists cloned dinosaurs?), *Groundhog Day* (Director: Harold Ramis, Screenwriters: Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis, 1993) (What if you lived the same day over and over again?), *Independence Day* (Director: Roland Emmerich, Screenwriters: Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich, 1996) (What if aliens attacked earth?), *The Exorcist* (Director: William Friedkin, Screenwriter: William Peter Blatty, 1973) (What if a teenage girl was possessed by the Devil?), *Jaws* (Director: Steven Spielberg, Screenwriters: Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb, 1975) (What if a shark attacked a popular seaside resort at the height of the summer holidays?), and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (What if a group of children hid an alien when it became stranded on earth?).

All these examples are commercially successful high-budget films aimed at a wide audience. But there are also a number of commercially successful low-budget films with high concepts, for example *The Blair Witch Project* (What if students making a documentary about witchcraft encounter a real witch?), *Friday the Thirteenth* (Director: Sean S. Cunningham, Screenwriter: Victor Miller, 1980) (What if a serial killer targeted teenagers at a summer camp?), *Pi* (Director and Screenwriter: Darren Aronofsky, 1998) (What if a mathematical genius discovered the key to understanding the universe?), *Primer* (Director and Screenwriter: Shane Carruth, 2004) (What if you could travel back and forwards in time?), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Director and Screenwriter: Wes Craven, 1984) (What if you could be killed in your dreams?).

My research examines films with high budgets, and films with low budgets, in a specific genre – science fiction – because the creative work associated with this exegesis is the screenplay for a low-budget science fiction film about a young woman who is transported to a parallel world. These science fiction films are all “high concept” due to the speculative nature of the genre.

The plots of six high-budget science fiction films are analysed, as well as the plots of four low-budget science fiction films, in order to see if they are consistent with the idea that the basic principles of successful screenplay construction correlates with commercial success in this genre.

Theory and Practice

The aim of this exegesis is to design a development plan for the writing of a low-budget science fiction film by drawing on a number of different sources: (i) the extensive "how-to-write-a-successful-screenplay" literature referred to above, (ii) theories of the conscious and unconscious proposed by Sigmund Freud, because of its importance in Joseph Campbell's work and its relevance to genres such as fantasy, horror and science fiction, and (iii) Judith Weston's book about Constantin Stanislavski's approach to acting and characterization, "Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film & Television" (1999), because of its focus on creating conflict between characters in a scene.

This step-by-step plan is formulated for each stage of the screenwriting process, and then applied to the development of the creative work from its basic idea through to a Third Draft which is able to be presented to the marketplace with a producer attached. It is a unique synthesis of previous work in the discipline, as well as from the other sources mentioned above, while the creative work produced through this particular creative practice makes an original contribution to the field of science fiction screenplays.

If the application of this particular development plan proves successful, it can then be used for future projects, and by other screenwriters.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical Hollywood Cinema

In their book "Film Art: An Introduction" (Ninth Edition, 2010), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson state that feature filmmaking both historically, and globally, has been dominated by a "single tradition of narrative form" which they call "Classical Hollywood Cinema":

> "This mode is called 'classical' because of its lengthy, stable and influential history, and 'Hollywood' because the mode assumed its most elaborate shape in American studio films. The same mode, however, governs many narrative films made in other countries. For example, *The Road Warrior (George Miller, 1981)*, though an Australian film is constructed along classical Hollywood lines." (Page 102)

Bordwell and Thompson describe the action in Classical Hollywood Cinema as being primarily driven by "individual characters as causal agents", with the narrative focusing on "personal psychological causes; decisions, choices, and traits of character."

> "Typically, what gets this sort of narrative going is someone's *desire*. A character wants something. The desire sets up a *goal*, and the course of the narrative's development will most likely involve the process of achieving that goal." (Page 102)

The example they use is the *Wizard of Oz* where the protagonist, Dorothy, has a clearly defined goal of getting home. In order to achieve this goal, she has to journey to Emerald City.

As they point out, however, such goals would not create drama if they were easily achieved. Therefore, in Classical Hollywood Cinema there is invariably an antagonist who gets in the way of the protagonist achieving their goal (in Dorothy's case, it's the Wicked Witch of the West). These opposing desires create conflict which is rarely resolved until the end of the film.

In Classical Hollywood Cinema there is a strong link between cause and effect, so that the actions of a character cause something to happen (the effect) which in turn needs to be reacted to (thus creating another cause). This leads to change, so that by the end of the film things aren't the same as they were at the beginning.

The way the story is told onscreen presents this cause and effect chain in a way the filmmakers believe will be the most engaging for an audience.

> "Finally, most classical narrative films display a strong degree of *closure* at the end. Leaving few loose ends unresolved, these films seek to complete their causal chains with a final effect. We usually learn the fate of each character, the answer to each mystery, and the outcome of each conflict." (Page 103)

When analyzing a film, Bordwell and Thompson make a distinction between its story and its plot:

> "The set of *all* the events in a narrative, both the ones explicitly presented and those the viewer infers, constitutes the story." (Page 80)
>
> Whereas:
>
> "The term *plot* is used to describe everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us." (Page 80)

For example, *Citizen Kane* (Director: Orson Welles, Screenwriters: Herman Mankiewicz and Orson Welles, 1941) tells the *story* of Charles Foster Kane from the time he was taken from his mother as a boy, through to his adult years as a newspaper publisher, and then his reclusive days as an old man. This story then continues after his death with a news reporter interviewing people who knew Kane, until finally the story ends when the snow-sled Kane had as a boy is burnt in a fire. The *plot*, on the other hand, begins with Kane's death, and then reveals the story of his life. Firstly through a newsreel, and then via flashbacks, as various people tell the news reporter about their relationship with Kane.

This exegesis is therefore primarily concerned with the way a screenwriter chooses to present the story to the audience as a particular sequence of events, which form the plot.

Three-Act Structure

In 1973, one of the most famous film directors of all time, Roman Polanski, made *Chinatown* with two Hollywood stars, Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, in the lead roles. On its release, the film, based on Robert Towne's *neo-noir* screenplay about corruption in Los Angeles in the 1930's, became the focus of much industry and critical attention. At the 1974 Academy Awards, the film was nominated for 11 Oscars, but eventually only won one; Best Original Screenplay.

Syd Field, a Hollywood "reader" (i.e. a person who reads screenplays for producers and production companies, and then writes a report either recommending it or not recommending it) studied the screenplay for *Chinatown*, as well as other commercially successful Hollywood films, and in 1979 his book, "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting", analysed the way these films followed a clearly defined plot structure, or "paradigm".

Field argues that this paradigm, as exemplified in *Chinatown*, is a three-act structure with a "Plot Point" at the end of the first and second act. These two Plot Points directly affect the protagonist (in *Chinatown* it is Jack Nicholson's character, private detective J.J. Gittes), and each Plot Point takes the story in a different direction, which works to keep the story fresh by making the next stage of the story unpredictable. That is, in keeping with Classical Hollywood Cinema, the Plot Point at the end of the First Act *causes* the protagonist to have a clearly defined goal, while the Plot Point at the end of the Second Act *causes* the protagonist to re-define the way he/she needs to achieve this goal or, alternatively, re-define their goal completely. For example, the first Plot Point in *Chinatown* causes Gittes to want to find the person who set him up, while the second Plot Point causes him to change this goal to one of wanting to find out whether or not the woman he has fallen in love with is involved in her husband's murder.

This paradigm doesn't break the plot into equal sections. The First Act ("the set-up") occupies the first 25 minutes (of a normal 100 minute feature film), the Second Act ("the confrontation") the next 50 minutes, and the Third Act ("the resolution") the final 25 minutes.

Field demonstrates that a number of commercially and critically successful mainstream films closely follow this paradigm, and therefore he recommends that in order for someone to write a screenplay that is to be a success by (a) attracting the

finance necessary to make it, and (b) providing the blueprint for a film which will engage an audience, they need to structure their screenplay the same way.

Within the Three-Act Structure

In his subsequent book, "The Screenwriter's Workbook" (1984), Field reinforces the importance of structure by quoting William Goldman, the Academy Award winning screenwriter of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Director: George Roy Hill, Screenwriter: William Goldman, 1969) and *All The President's Men* (Director: Alan J. Pakula, Screenwriter: William Goldman, 1976) when he says: "A screenplay is structure. It is the spine you hang your story on." (Page 20) That is, the various elements of a screenplay - scenes, description, characters, dialogue and action – must be given "a definite shape and form, complete with beginning, middle and end." (Page 20) Field adds: "A screenplay is a story told in pictures, dialogue, and description, within the context of dramatic structure." (Page 20)

In the same book, Field proposes a further refinement to the paradigm of a three-act structure containing two Plot Points. This involves a Mid-point half way through the Second Act (and therefore half way through the film as a whole). He describes the Mid-point's function as providing a "link in the chain of dramatic action, it *connects* the first half of Act II with the second half of Act II." (Page 135)

Linda Seger, in "Making A Good Script Great" (Second Edition, 1994), describes the Mid-point scene as "giving a change in direction for the second half of the (second) act, while still keeping the overall focus of Act Two which has been determined by the first turning point." (Page 35)

That is, just like the first Plot Point, this Mid-point keeps the story fresh and unpredictable by taking the story in another direction, but unlike the first Plot Point it does not create or change the goal of the protagonist. In *Chinatown*, Gittes' goal in the Second Act is to find out who set him up and why, while the Mid-point is his discovery that Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) is the daughter of the man he suspects of being involved in her husband's death. This does not change his goal, but it adds another dimension to the detective story, and eventually leads to the shocking discovery near the end of the film that Evelyn has a daughter who is the result of her incestuous relationship with her father (the man who set Gittes up).

In his application of Joseph Campbell's theories to the plots of feature films, "The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers" (Third Edition, 2007), Christopher Vogler divides this three-act structure further into twelve distinct stages of the "Hero's Journey"; Act One consists of the "Ordinary World", "Call to Adventure", "Refusal of the Call", "Meeting with the Mentor" and "Crossing the First Threshold", Act Two then involves "Tests, Allies, Enemies", "Approach to the Inmost Cave", "Ordeal" and "Reward", and finally Act Three is "The Road Back", "Resurrection" and "Return with the Elixir." (Page 8)

In his "Hero's Journey Model" (Page 8), Vogler places "Approach to the Inmost Cave" and "Ordeal" at the middle of Act Two – i.e. the mid-point of the plot – and describes the "Approach to the Inmost Cave" as follows:

> "The hero comes at last to the edge of a dangerous place, sometimes deep underground, where the object of the quest is hidden. Often it's the headquarters of the hero's greatest enemy, the most dangerous spot in the Special World, the Inmost Cave." (Page 14)
>
> "In the modern mythology of *Star Wars,* the Approach to the Inmost Cave is Luke Skywalker and company being sucked into the Death Star where they will face Darth Vader…. In *The Wizard of Oz* it's Dorothy being kidnapped to the Wicked Witch's baleful castle…" (Page 14)

The "Ordeal" is described as follows: "Here the fortunes of the hero hit bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear. He faces the possibility of death and is brought to the brink in a battle with a hostile force." (Pages 14/15)

> "In *Star Wars,* it's the harrowing moment in the bowels of the Death Star when Luke, Leia and company are trapped in the giant trashmasher…. In *The Wizard of Oz,* Dorothy and her friends are trapped by the Wicked Witch, and it looks like there is no way out." (Page 15)

Another refinement within the three-act structure is what is known as the "Inciting Incident". This is the first event, or catalyst, that "sets the story in motion" (Linda Seger, Third Edition, 2010, Page 26). In Vogler's twelve stages of the "Hero's Journey", it is the initial "Call to Adventure" he describes as being early in Act One when the hero is presented with "a problem, challenge or adventure to undertake." (Vogler, Page 10)

"In *Star Wars*, the Call to Adventure is Princess Leia's desperate holographic message to wise old Obi Wan Kenobi, who asks Luke to join in the quest." (Vogler, Page 10)

In "Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting" (1997), Robert McKee states that the Inciting Incident must "hook" the audience and occur as early as possible in the story after the protagonist and his/her world has been established. (Page 202)

In his book "Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach" (2004), Paul Joseph Gulino is more specific, describing the Inciting Incident as occurring at the end of the first sequence of scenes, and that it is "the first intrusion of instability on the initial flow of life, forcing the protagonist to respond in some way." (Page 14)

Yet another way of structuring a screenplay within the three-act structure is proposed by Gulino when he states that most successful mainstream films are comprised of eight sequences. Each sequence is made up of a number of scenes and each sequence has "its own protagonist, tension, rising action, and resolution – just like a film as a whole" (Page 2). Conflicts and issues are either partially resolved at the end of the sequence or the resolution opens up new conflict and issues which then become the subject of the next sequence.

Gulino divides a film into two sequences in Act One, four sequences in Act Two, and two sequences in Act Three. The first sequence introduces the protagonist and ends on the Inciting Incident, while the second sequence sets up "the dramatic question that will shape the rest of the picture" (Page 15) and ends with the first Plot Point. The third sequence sees the protagonist attempt to solve the problem that arose at the end of the previous sequence. This either fails or is resolved in such a way that a bigger problem arises. In the fourth sequence, the protagonist tries to solve the new problem or tries to solve the original problem in a different way, and this sequence ends at the Mid-point. In the fifth sequence, the protagonist deals with whatever new complications arose at the Mid-point. The sixth sequence results in the dramatic question being answered (at the second Plot Point). It is interesting to note here that Gulino believes that in most successful films, the dramatic question - e.g. "Will Roger Thornhill find out what is going on and clear his name?" in *North By Northwest* (Director: Alfred Hitchcock, Screenwriter: Ernest Lehman, 1959) - is actually answered at the end of the second act and a new dramatic question then arises (in the case of *North By Northwest*: "Will Thornhill now be able to save Eve?"). The seventh sequence then sees the protagonist trying to resolve the new dramatic question and at the end of this sequence there is

often a major twist. The eighth and final sequence leads to the final resolution and then, quite often, an epilogue which ties up any loose ends (e.g. an unresolved subplot).

When constructing the plot for a feature film, the template of the basic three-act structure provides a good starting point. But because each of these acts is quite long (especially the second), dramatic events other than just two Plot Points are needed in order to engage the audience within each act. An Inciting Incident in Act One, as well as a Mid-point in Act Two, can provide additional "action points" which *cause a reaction* and therefore drive the story forward (Linda Seger, Third Edition, 2010, Page 67). By further dividing the basic structure into sequences, other action points can also be incorporated into the narrative.

Characters and Goals

In "The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Writers" (Third Edition, 2007), Christopher Vogler states that the dramatic function of the "Hero" is to provide the audience with a window into the story: "Each person hearing a tale or watching a play or movie is invited, in the early stages of the story, to *identify* with the Hero, to merge with him and see the world of the story through his eyes." (Page 30)

Syd Field's paradigm is structured around a *protagonist* who is introduced to the audience in Act One and at the start of Act Two sets out to achieve a specific goal. Standing in the way are obstacles, most often an *antagonist* whose goal is the opposite to the protagonist's. In Act Three the protagonist becomes involved in a climactic struggle with the antagonist and most Hollywood films then end when the protagonist finally achieves his or her goal.

According to Matthew Campora in "Subjective Realist Cinema: From Expressionism to *Inception*" (2014), the classical Hollywood style can be seen as "an attempt to generate in spectators a sense of immediacy by eliciting absorption in the narrative" with the creation of "believable characters" (Page 42). In most mainstream films, this not only results in the spectator identifying with the protagonist, but also a desire to see them succeed in reaching their goal, much the same way the spectator would want to see themselves, a close friend or family member, succeed. An ending where this happens rewards the audience by providing "the type of satisfaction expected by viewers of classical Hollywood cinema." (Page 130) As Vogler states:

"Stories invite us to invest part of our personal identity in the Hero for the duration of the experience." (Page 30) A happy ending where the protagonist achieves their goal therefore rewards that investment, as does a dramatically satisfying ending which might not be happy, but resolves the conflict previously set up in the film in a way which the spectator finds believable.

In Classical Hollywood Cinema, the protagonist has a clearly defined goal and the story is propelled by the actions of the protagonist. However, a number of filmmakers have deliberately shied away from this structure, focusing on characters with no real goal. For example, in *Lost in Translation* (Director and Screenwriter: Sofia Coppola, 2003), the two main characters, played by Scarlett Johansson and Bill Murray, both don't know what they want out of life. These films invariably have much lower budgets than those produced by the major studios, and are classified as "independent", not just because they are financed independent of the studio system, but also because their subject matter is not aligned to Classical Hollywood Cinema. They are also usually "low concept" films in the drama and/or comedy genres, with stories focusing on characters and their relationships (another good example is *Sideways* (Director: Alexander Payne, Screenwriters: Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor, 2004) which won an Academy Award for its screenplay in 2005, as did *Lost In Translation* the previous year).

If a film sets up a goal which the protagonist pursues by action as a result of the Inciting Incident and the Plot Point at the end of Act One, then it is invariably an *external* goal. That is, it can be achieved by following a clear course of action. In *Chinatown*, for example, J.J. Gittes' goal is to find out who set him up. To do this he simply has to solve the case. He eventually does just this, but in keeping with the *film noir* genre the film revives, the final resolution is not a happy one. However, it is a dramatically satisfying ending for the audience, not only because it's true to its genre, but also because the outcome is believable given what has happened in the lead up to it. Throughout the film the theme of political and personal corruption has been explored and many in the audience will reluctantly accept its ultimate standpoint on this issue; that the rich and powerful can do almost anything, without consequences.

An ending will therefore be dramatically satisfying for an audience if they accept it as resolving the conflict (which has been set up in the first act and then developed in the second act) in a believable way. For example, at the end of *Chinatown*, Mrs Mulwray's death resolves the conflict. It's all over. J. J. Gittes has lost and in true *film noir* style, a corrupt world endures.

Craig Batty and Zara Waldeback in "Writing for the Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches" (2008) make a distinction between the *external* goal (or "want") of the protagonist and his/her *internal* goal (or "need"). They see the central character journey of the story as one where the character takes action to achieve their external goal while, often unconsciously, needing to achieve their internal goal. The example they use is *Muriel's Wedding* (Director and Screenwriter: Paul J. Hogan, 1994): "Muriel's character want is to get married – even the title says so – but her need is to realise that her friendship with Rhonda is more important." (Page 20)

Muriel therefore achieves her external goal when she marries the South African swimmer, but this only causes her happiness for a short while. It is only when she decides to reconnect with Rhonda and they become friends again, that the film ends on a positive and dramatically satisfying note for both Muriel and the spectator. If the story was solely about Muriel's external goal, the film wouldn't have resonated with audiences the way it did.

According to John Truby ("The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps To Becoming A Master Storyteller", 2007), the internal goal of the protagonist should have two distinct characteristics. First, the protagonist should not be aware of his/her need at the start of the film. Second, the protagonist should have a "moral need as well as a psychological need." A psychological need involves overcoming a serious character or emotional flaw "that is hurting nobody but the hero" whereas a "moral need is always hurting others in some way." (Page 41) Truby uses the *The Verdict* (Director: Sidney Lumet, Screenwriter: David Mamet, 1982) as an example, where the main character is a lawyer whose psychological need is to beat his drinking problem and regain his self-respect, while his moral need is to stop using other people for money and "learn to act with justice". (Page 41)

With a protagonist having both an external goal and an internal goal, there are four possible endings:

(i) One in which both the external goal and the internal goal are achieved. For example, the happy ending of *Muriel's Wedding.*

(ii) One in which the external goal is achieved, but the internal goal isn't. Such a resolution can still provide the audience with a dramatically satisfying ending. For example, in *The Blair Witch Project* the protagonists,

a group of student filmmakers, want to find the witch but need to survive. They achieve their external goal when they find what they are looking for, but unfortunately, they don't achieve their internal goal as they all die. This is still a dramatically satisfying ending because it is (a) believable, since the antagonist is an evil entity, and (b) true to the film's genre, horror, where quite often the protagonist, or some of the protagonists, do not survive – e.g. *The Omen* (Director: Richard Donner, Screenwriter: David Seltzer, 1976), *Wolf Creek* (Director and Screenwriter: Greg McLean, 2005), and *Paranormal Activity* (Director and Screenwriter: Oren Pelli, 2009).

(iii) One in which the internal goal is achieved but the external goal isn't. Again, this can still provide the audience with a dramatically satisfying ending. For example, in the low-budget film, *Open Water* (Director and Screenwriter: Chris Kentis, 2003), the husband and wife protagonists have a clearly defined external goal; to survive. Their antagonists are the sharks trying to eat them. At the same time, their internal goal is their need to keep loving each other. This leads to a very sad, but dramatically satisfying, ending where, because of their ordeal, they now love each other in a truly meaningful way and when he dies she decides to die too.

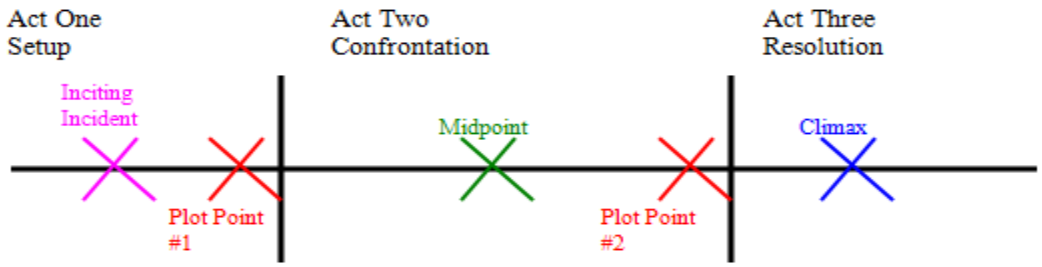
(iv) One in which neither the internal goal nor the external goal is achieved. For an audience, such an ending is going to be the least dramatically satisfying of the four and one that producers and financiers consider the least commercial. They are, however, prepared to take a chance when it is an award-winning auteur like Paul Thomas Anderson working with a high-profile cast. A good example is Anderson's *The Master* (2012), starring Joaquin Phoenix, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Amy Adams. The protagonist's external goal is to adjust to life after the Second World War, but he's violent, obsessed with sex, and an alcoholic. His internal goal is to find a reason to live, and when he joins a cult called "The Cause" it initially offers him hope. But ultimately it doesn't provide the answer and at the end of the film he still hasn't found what he wants, or what he needs in life to survive emotionally. Despite this, the producers were able to secure a relatively high budget of US$32 million to make the film. It then grossed US$28 million worldwide (www.boxofficemojo.com) and was nominated for three academy awards; Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role (Joaquin Phoenix), Best Performance by an Actor in a

Supporting Role (Philip Seymour Hoffman), and Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role (Amy Adams). Also, the review aggregation website, Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) classifies 236 of the reviews the film received from a variety of critics in the U.S.A. as being positive compared with 35 negative (a rating of +87%). The film can therefore be considered an artistic success, if not a commercial success, and Paul Thomas Anderson was able to secure the finance required to make his next film, *Inherent Vice* (Director and Screenwriter: Paul Thomas Anderson, 2014), in a relatively short time.

In developing the plot for a feature film screenplay, one of the first steps is to identify whose story it is. In a single protagonist film the audience will engage in a character's journey if it is both physical (i.e. towards an external goal) and emotional (i.e. towards an internal goal). What the protagonist *wants* "clearly relates to the outer, plot-centred thread of a screenplay" while what the protagonist *needs* relates to "the inner, emotion-centred thread" and "together they explore both the personal and the universal, and create the complete narrative experience of a screenplay." (Batty, 2010, Pages 291-308)

Beyond a One-Dimensional Structure

The paradigm discussed above can be represented as a one-dimensional line from the beginning of the plot until the end:



(Source:https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Plot+Structure&biw=1350&bih=794&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOpqubh7LSAhUCl1QKHbYgCFAQ_AUIBigB)

An additional dimension can then be applied to this three-act structure by incorporating the theories of Joseph Campbell and Sigmund Freud.

Watching a film in a cinema is analogous to closing one's eyes (as the house lights dim) and entering a dreamlike state (as the film begins). What you experience is no longer under your conscious control as if in a dream-like state you enter another world, which can give you pleasure and a sense of wonder (e.g. the Japanese animated film *Spirited Away* (Director and Screenwriter: Hayao Miyazaki, 2001) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Director: Stanley Kubrick, Screenwriters: Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clark)) or one which feels like an anxiety dream (e.g. *Mulholland Drive* (Director and Screenwriter: David Lynch, 2001)), or even a terrifying nightmare (e.g. any horror film by Italian director Dario Argento, but in particular *Suspiria* (Director: Dario Argento, Screenwriters: Dario Argento and Daria Nicolodi, 1977)).

This suggests that in certain genres such as fantasy, horror and science fiction, the three-act structure of the plot can be given an additional dimension by incorporating psychological concepts related to dream theory.

In "The Hero With A Thousand Faces" (Third Edition, 2008), Joseph Campbell examines the links between our dreams and civilization's myths, fairy stories and legends. He discusses how psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud discovered through their patients that "the patterns and logic of fairy tale and myth correspond to those of a dream." (Page 219) Like Freud, Campbell believes that such dreams are a product of the unconscious mind: "Particularly after the work of the psychoanalysts, there can be little doubt, either that myths are of the nature of dream, or that dreams are symptomatic of the dynamics of the psyche." (Page 219)

He notes, however, that:

> "Myths are not exactly comparable to dream. Their figures originate from the same sources – the unconscious wells of fantasy – and their grammar is the same, but they are not spontaneous products of sleep. On the contrary, their patterns are consciously controlled. And their understood function is to serve as a powerful picture language for the communication of traditional wisdom." (Page 220)

The protagonist's journey in the genres mentioned above is often one in which he/she crosses from the rational world of the conscious to the irrational world of the unconscious. In the fantasy film *Wizard of Oz*, this crossover occurs when Dorothy is transported from the real world of Kansas to the surreal world of Oz. At the end of the film, Dorothy then returns to the real world when she wakes up from her "dream". A similar journey occurs in the animation film *Alice In Wonderland* (Directors: Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson & Hamilton Luske, Writer: Lewis Carroll, 1951) when Alice falls asleep and enters the surreal wonderland of her unconscious, then finally returns when she wakes up.

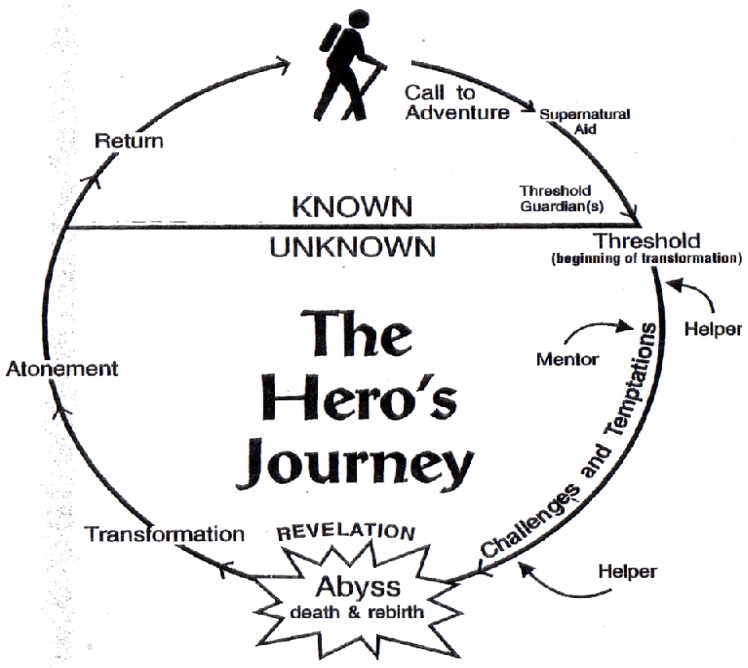
> "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of *supernatural* wonder, fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won, the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." (Joseph Campbell, Page 23)

> "Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a *dream* landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials." (Page 81)

When discussing the legend of the Irish hero "Oisin", Campbell interprets his journey as one where he "descended consciously (awake) into the kingdom of the unconscious (deep sleep)". (Page 190)

The protagonist's crossover occurs as either the Inciting Incident (*Alice In Wonderland*) or the first Plot Point (*The Wizard of Oz*), while the return to the real world corresponds to what Campbell describes as the "Return With The Elixir" at the end of the "Hero's journey".

This can be represented as:

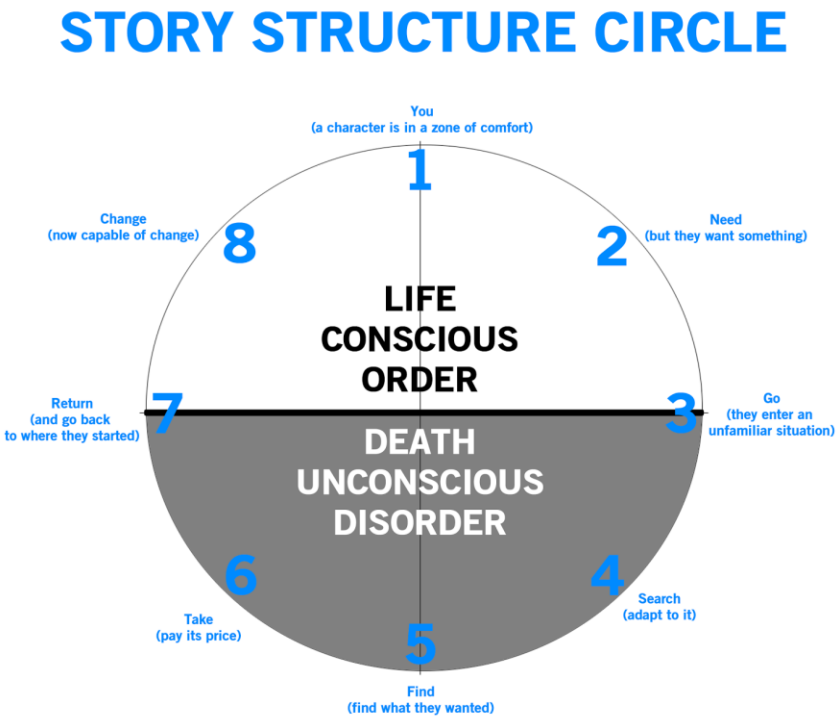


(Source: https://www.google.com.au/search?q=story+structure+circle)

The beginning, middle and end of the plot is the protagonist's journey from one state (the "Known"), to another (the "Unknown"), then back to the original state. And here the "Known" can also be seen as the "Ordinary", "Awake", "Conscious", "Real", "Natural", or "Rational" world of the protagonist, while the "Unknown" is the "Extraordinary", "Dream", "Unconscious", "Surreal", "Supernatural", or "Irrational" world.

This division of the protagonist's world into different states is further explored in a recent video essay called "Every Story Is The Same" by Will Shroder (www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuD2Aa0zFiA) where he discusses screenwriter Dan Harmon's (the creator/writer of television's *Community* and *Rick and Morty*) adaptation of the above story circle into eight separate steps and two different zones.

This can be illustrated in the following way (with the plot being represented by the circumference of the circle moving clockwise from beginning to end):



(Source: https://www.google.com.au/search?q=story+structure+circle)

That is, Harmon divides Campbell's "Known"/"Unknown" world into three dualities: "Life" and "Death", "Conscious" and "Unconscious", and "Order" and "Disorder".

Shroder describes it this way:

> "The top of the circle represents where the character's journey starts and finishes. The bottom represents the world that needs to be traversed in order to grow and change. In a basic sense, (the top half) represents the ordinary world and (the bottom half) is the special world". (2:33 to 2:47)

Harmon believes a story will resonate with an audience and have universal appeal if the plot follows the above structure and takes their ego on a trip to the unconscious and back.

Genre

In “Save The Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You’ll Ever Need” (2005), Blake Snyder states that it is imperative for a writer to know the genre of their story before they start writing. (Page 23) He advises that this is necessary to avoid being derivative while working within the ten movie “categories” that have proved successful, and are not the standard “genre types” such as Romantic Comedy and Biography which don’t necessarily tell you what the story is about. These categories include “Monster in the House” (e.g. *Alien* (Director: Ridley Scott, Screenwriter: Dan O’Bannon, 1979) and *Jaws*), “Dude With A Problem” (e.g. *Die Hard* (Director: John McTiernan, Screenwriters: Jeb Stuart and Steven E. de Souza, 1988) and *Titanic* (Director and Screenwriter: James Cameron, 1997)), and “Whydunit” (e.g. *Chinatown* and *JFK* (Director: Oliver Stone, Screenwriters: Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, 1991)).

Robert McKee, in “Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting” (1997), defines 25 different genres (Pages 80-86), including Science Fiction, Fantasy, Musical, Western, War, etc. Apart from these standard genres, he also identifies other less obvious genres based on the plot of the film. For example, he identifies the “Education Plot” as one which involves “a deep change within the protagonist’s view of life, people or self from the negative (naïve, distrustful, fatalistic, self-hating) to the positive (wise, trusting, optimistic, self-possessed)” (Page 81), and sees films such as *Harold and Maude* (Director: Hal Ashby, Screenwriter: Colin Higgins, 1971), *Tender Mercies* (Director: Bruce Beresford, Screenwriter: Horton Foote, 1983) and *Muriel’s Wedding* as belonging to this particular genre.

Studying Blake Snyder’s and Robert McKee’s work on genres is important for a screenwriter, not just to avoid merely copying what’s been done before, but also to assist in the construction of a screenplay that will engage potential readers who work in the film industry (e.g. producers, sales agents, distributors, and financiers). From my experience, these professionals want something *original* but at the same time they want something *familiar* such as a science fiction film, an education plot, or a monster in the house story. They believe that a film in a specific genre can be marketed to a particular audience and this makes it easier for them to raise the finance to produce it and then reach an audience when it is completed.

One of the ways a writer can make their screenplay original but familiar is to consider what Jule Selbo ("Film Genre For The Screenwriter", 2015) calls "supporting genres". Her book explores "how a screenwriter can use the functions of genre in creating a film story." (Page 9) She believes that most successful movies are a combination of two or more genres – e.g. *Tootsie* (comedy/romance/coming of age), *Alien* (sci-fi/horror), and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (western/ buddy movie/comedy) (Page 66). Therefore, rather than focus on a single genre and risk creating the screenplay for a B-grade "genre film" which lacks originality because of its close resemblance to previous work, Selbo recommends using "supporting genres" to do the "heavy lifting of the story". (Page 120) An example she uses is *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Director: Michel Gondry, Screenwriter: Charlie Kaufman, 2004) whose narrative is constructed around a scientific hypothesis about the possibility of memory erasures. In the film "it is the romance genre line that makes us care about the characters and it is the sci-fi genre that engages our imagination." (Page 121)

Premise and Controlling Idea

> "Two ideas bracket the creative process: *Premise*, the idea that inspires the writer's desire to create a story, and *Controlling Idea*, the story's ultimate meaning expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax." (Robert McKee, 1997, Page 112)

The premise of a story is the dramatic question that triggers the plot. Most often it is in the form of a "What if?" For example: "What would you do if you went back in time three days?"

A premise is often the inspiration that motivates a writer to start writing a screenplay. But premises can often be very similar to the basic idea itself and formulating one before you start writing can be relatively easy and not help much in advancing the creative process. For example, "What would happen if a shark attacked someone at a popular beach resort in the middle of the summer holidays?" is a strong premise for a feature film, but it's basically the same as the original idea itself: "A shark attacks someone at a popular beach resort in the middle of summer."

A Controlling Idea, on the other hand, is a step forward, and writers such as McKee see it as essential when developing a screenplay. In "Story: Substance, Structure,

Style and the Principles of Screenwriting" (1997), he writes that it has two components:

> "Value plus Cause. It identifies the positive or negative charge of the story's critical value at the last act's climax, and it identifies the chief reason that this value has changed to its final state. A sentence composed from these two elements, Value plus Cause, expresses the core meaning of the story." (Page 115)

"Value" here is the importance of something such as justice, honesty, self-worth, happiness, love, equality, freedom, etc., while "Cause" is the primary reason this value has been attained by the end of the film.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this concept is by example. If a protagonist is faced with an injustice and has to struggle against it, then the Controlling Idea of the film might be: "Justice only prevails when you fight for it". That is, "justice" is the value but it only comes into the world of the protagonist at the end of the film because he/she has fought for it.

This example is a general Controlling Idea and applies to a number of different films. A Controlling Idea can also relate to a particular type of story such as the revenge film - e.g. "Justice triumphs when the protagonist is more violent than the criminals" (*Dirty Harry* (Director: Don Siegel, Screenwriters: Harry Julian Fink, Rita M. Fink, and Dean Riesner, 1971), *Death Wish* (Director: Michael Winner, Screenwriter: Wendell Mayes, 1974) and *Lipstick* (Director: Lamont Johnson, Screenwriter: David Rayfiel, 1976)) - or a specific film (e.g. *Missing* (Director: Costa-Gavras, Screenwriters: Costa-Gavras and Donald Stewart, 1982); "Tyranny prevails because it's supported by a corrupt CIA"). (Robert McKee, 1997, Page 117)

The primary Value being explored in a film is usually the primary theme of the film. So, for example, *Muriel's Wedding* might have self-worth as its Value, but it's also one of its major themes. The Controlling Idea of the film can be expressed as "loyalty to friendship (Cause) increases self-worth (Value)". That is, the cause of Muriel's feeling of increased self-worth at the end of the film is her valuing her friendship with Rhonda above all else. As she tells Rhonda: "When I lived in Porpoise Spit, I used to sit in my room for hours and listen to ABBA songs. But since I've met you and moved to Sydney, I haven't listened to one ABBA song. That's because my life is as good as an ABBA song. It's as good as Dancing Queen." (46 mins. 56 secs.)

By expressing the core meaning of the story, the Controlling Idea can also be seen as the "message" the film is communicating to the audience. For example, in *The Wizard of Oz* a major theme is the notion of "home" and where one truly belongs. By the end of the film Dorothy has learnt that "there's no place like home", and so the message to the audience is: "You don't need to search for happiness anywhere but at home". Similarly, the film's Controlling Idea can be expressed as: "You'll find out there's no place like home (Value) when you leave your home (Cause)."

The Development Process

The above research has uncovered an abundance of material relating to plot structure and the analysis of a myriad feature films. However, the application of various paradigms to the plots of these films is invariably done after the film itself has been finished and released and does not examine how their screenplays were constructed step-by-step from their initial idea through to the final shooting draft. For example, in "The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming A Master Storyteller" (2007), John Truby outlines his 22 building blocks for structuring an "organic" plot. These are highly prescriptive and include steps such as "Self-revelation, need, and desire", "Ghost and story world", "Weakness and need", "Inciting event", "Desire", "Ally or allies", "Opponent and/or mystery" and "Fake-ally opponent" as just the first 8 steps of any plot (Page 268). He then uses *Tootsie* to demonstrate how closely it follows this paradigm. There is no doubt the final film does just this, but the original story for the film was written by Don McGuire and Larry Gelbart. Then Larry Gelbart and Murray Shisgal either wrote together, or separately, different drafts of the screenplay (and receive the official screenplay credits on IMDb). Three additional writers who were uncredited on the film, are also listed on IMDb as contributing to the screenplay; Barry Levinson, Robert Garland, and Elaine May (www.imdb.com/Tootsie). It is therefore safe to conclude that the screenplay went through a number of different stages of development, and with each draft the plot would have changed to some extent, not only with the contribution of each of these writers but also with the input of director, Sydney Pollack, as well as Tootsie himself, Dustin Hoffman. John Truby's 22 steps therefore don't give much guidance to someone wanting to develop an idea through to a screenplay. In fact, it could be argued that these sort of fixed-in-stone steps potentially paralyse creativity because the final edited version of the film has such a clever plot structure it might simply seem impossible for a lone writer to emulate.

Syd Field, in "The Screenwriter's Workbook" (1984), suggests that the best way to start a screenplay is with the main character and the line of action that occurs in the film. In order to do this four things have to be defined: "ending, beginning, Plot Point 1, and Plot Point II. These four elements are the structural foundation of your screenplay. You 'hang' your entire (plot) around these four elements." (Page 35) Once these are determined, he suggests writing a four-page "treatment". This is a synopsis which summarizes the story from start to end. From this treatment he recommends writing a brief summary of each scene on a card. (Pages 95-100)

"Making A Good Script Great" (1994) by Linda Seger contains many suggestions as to how to write and then rewrite a screenplay, including starting with the same scene cards that Field suggests, or starting with a treatment of about eight to fifteen pages, or writing the first draft immediately the idea is there. Like Field, she believes in a clearly defined three-act plot structure of set-up, development and resolution which gives the story "form, focus, momentum and clarity." (Page 19) She also suggests that the writer must know the "central question" of the film they are writing:

> "Every story, in a sense, is a mystery. It asks a question in the set-up that will be answered in the climax. Usually a problem is introduced, or a situation that needs to be resolved is presented. This situation or problem raises a question in our minds, such as 'Will John Book get the murderer?' (*Witness*); 'Will the Germans get away with the massacre?' (*The African Queen*); 'Will Martin catch the shark?' (*Jaws*)." (Page 26)
>
> "Once it is raised, everything that happens in the story relates to that question. Most often, the central question is answered 'yes' in the climax of the story." (Page 26)

"How to Write A Movie in 21 Days" (Viki King, 1988) proposes that the best way to develop a screenplay is to: "Write from your heart; rewrite from your head." (Page 6) This means writing all the characters, scenes and dialogue as spontaneously as possible in what she calls a "random" draft, and at the end of this process rewriting it as quickly as possible (hence the title of her book).

She does add, however, that once a writer has decided that their idea is a movie (rather than a novel, a play, or a song) they should write a "Logline" for their proposed

film. She defines this as the "story reduced to an ad copy blurb that tells what your story is about and makes us want to see it." (Page 37)

> She then uses examples from three films:
>
> "*Down & Out in Beverly Hills*: See what happens when a dirty bum meets the filthy rich.
>
> Goldie Hawn's *Wildcats*: Her dream was to coach high school football. Her nightmare was Central High.
>
> *The Money Pit*: For everyone who's ever been deeply in love or deeply in debt." (Page 37)

What she is actually referring to here is more often referred to as a "Tagline" rather than a "Logline", with the Oxford Dictionary defining a Tagline as "a catchphrase or slogan, especially as used in advertising." (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com)

Blake Snyder, in "Save The Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need" (2005) also advocates starting with a Logline before launching into the screenplay. Henry Tefay, a script editor and former Screen Queensland development executive, agrees. In his unpublished manuscript, "Box Office Gold: Why Some Movies Go Through The Roof and Others Sink Without A Trace", he too proposes that writers develop a Logline first, but both his and Snyder's concept of a Logline is completely different to King's:

> "A Logline has to have a main character, in a world, with an emotional or character issue who experiences an antagonistic event that creates a problem and gives the character an external physical goal that must be achieved while the antagonist forces create obstacles and conflict, forcing the character to confront the antagonistic forces and trigger a surprising twist and climax that finally resolves the problem." (Tefay, Page 46)

It is a summary of the story in one sentence, generally between 25 and 30 words long. The example Tefay uses is the Logline for *Taken* (Director: Pierre Morel, Screenwriters: Luc Besson and Robert Mark Kamen, 2008): "A CIA agent retires to spend time with his daughter but is forced to use his combat skills to rescue her when she's abducted in

Paris and sold into slavery." (Page 48) In just 30 words this tells us (a) the setting, (b) that the protagonist is an ex-CIA agent, and (c) what the antagonistic event is that creates a problem for him.

Tefay also states that by the end of the First Act of a screenplay you need to have established eight story elements: the main character, the main character's world, the main character's emotional issue, the Inciting Incident, the First Act Plot Point, the antagonist(s), the main character's external physical goal and the main character's internal emotional goal. The above Logline, either explicitly or implicitly, has all these elements; a main character and his world ("A CIA agent"), the main character's emotional issue ("to spend time with his daughter"), the Inciting Incident ("retires"), the First Act Plot Point ("when she's abducted in Paris"), the antagonist(s) (whoever abducted her), the main character's external physical goal ("to rescue her") and the main character's internal goal (he *needs* to reconnect with his daughter). That is, the Logline doesn't have to tell the whole story, it only needs to outline what happens in the First Act. Based on the Logline for *Taken*, however, the genre is quite clearly action-thriller and therefore the rest of the plot can easily be inferred as follows; the second act will be the protagonist's desperate search for his daughter and trying to find out who abducted her, while the third act will be his violent confrontation with the antagonist(s) responsible.

Tefay believes that even if you have a good idea for a film (e.g. a young girl is abducted and sold into slavery), you can't start writing the screenplay based on this idea alone. "Before writing a single word of the screenplay and before laying out the plot or story it is crucial to have a Logline that contains the central idea of the movie, and that idea has to be a 1st act plot point." (Page 49)

He then suggests a way this Logline can be tested to see whether it is capable of generating the plot for a feature film screenplay. It needs to ensure two things:

> "(1) That the *idea* is in fact a 1st act plot point that creates a problem, an antagonist, a physical goal and an emotional or character goal – *because it is those four elements that generate a continuous series of obstacles and conflict for the main character in the second act until the problem is resolved in the third act;* and (2) That *the main elements of the first act can be extracted from the Logline."* (Page 49)

The Story's Spine

Pixar Animation Studios is one of the most successful production companies in the world. Its first feature film, *Toy Story* (Director: John Lasseter, Screenwriters: Joss Whedon, Andrew Stanton, Joel Cohen, and Alec Sokolow, 1995) grossed US$373 million in cinemas worldwide and generated two equally successful sequels. At the 1996 Academy Awards it was nominated for three Oscars, including Best Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen.

One of Pixar's story artists, Emma Coats, recently tweeted twenty-two rules of storytelling that were important in creating a Pixar film. Stephan Vladamir Bugaj subsequently analyzed each of these rules in an eBook published online (http://www.bugaj.com/blog/2013/10/31/pixars-22-rules-of-story-analyzed-as-a-pdf-ebook). In his analysis he highlights the important "Story Spine" as being: "Once upon a time there was _____ . Every day _____ . One day _____ . Because of that _____ . Because of that _____ . Until eventually _____ ." (Rule 4) This is a way of simplifying the plot in terms of its set up, trigger, change through conflict, and then final resolution.

Thus the Story Spine of *Toy Story* can be described as: "*Once upon a time there was* a toy cowboy called Woody. *Every day* he would be the favourite toy of his human master, Andy. *One day* a new toy arrived, Buzz Lightyear, who was a spaceman and quickly became Andy's new favourite. *Because of that* Woody wanted to win back the affection of Andy. *Because of that* Woody and Buzz became enemies. *Until eventually* they worked together and both ended up by Andy's side.

Another way of approaching the structure of a story is contained in Rule 22: "What's the essence of your story? What's the most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there." In discussing this particular rule, Bugaj points out that by following Rule 4 the writer would have already worked out the essence of the story and the most economical way of telling it (i.e. the way the plot will be structured). He suggests, however, that the most useful way of thinking about Rule 22 is to ask: *What's your story pitch?*

A good pitch, he believes, strips the plot down to its essential elements:

" • Title and genre

• Who the story is about (the protagonist)

• Where and when the story takes place (the setting)

• Her want and how it isn't met (the core conflict)

• The plot outcome if the protagonist fails (the external stakes)

• Her need and what will happen if it isn't realized (the internal stakes)

• What about her character and philosophy is being tested (the thematic question or philosophical stakes)

• The most crucial turning points in the story (the inciting incident, the midpoint twist/kicker, and the low point)

• The final resolution (of the plot, character arc, and thematic question)"

Bugaj sees the resulting Synopsis as being completely different to a Logline which is only one sentence and "just a statement of the core concept." The example he uses for *Blade Runner* (Director: Ridley Scott, Screenwriters: Hampton Fancher and David Peoples, 1982) is three paragraphs (one for each act) totaling 111 words and communicates effectively all the essential elements of the plot listed above (see Appendix A). It uses the following structure:

Ist paragraph: (Title) is a (genre) about (main character) who (first act set-up and Plot Point 1).

2nd paragraph: What (main character) is trying to achieve in the second act.

3rd paragraph: What (main character) finally achieves (external physical goal and internal emotional/character goal) in the third act.

Constructing a Scene

Most of the literature referred to above concerns itself with characters in action, themes and plot structure. Very few of the authors examine the way a scene is actually written into the overall structure.

In “Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting” (1997), Robert McKee defines a scene as an “action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character’s life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance.” (Page 35) This may be accurate when describing a well-written scene, but it’s not very helpful in illuminating how to approach the writing of that scene in the first place. According to McKee, every scene should ideally be a “Story Event”. Again, this is not helpful because it simply means that something must happen.

When analyzing a particular scene from *Chinatown*, however, McKee writes about the scene objectives of the characters involved. Gittes’s scene objective is “*to find the truth*” while Evelyn Mulwray’s scene objective is “*to hide her secret and escape with (her daughter)”* (Page 155). The scene will therefore have dramatic conflict between the two characters because his goal is the exact opposite of her goal.

This reflects the work of the Russian theatre director, Konstantin Stanislavski, in teaching performance techniques when preparing a scene. As summarized by Judith Weston in her book “Directing Actors; Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television” (1996), Stanislavski’s approach to acting can be used by film directors to analyse a scene prior to rehearsing it with the actors. Craig Batty and Zara Waldebeck note in “Writing For The Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches” (2008), that Judith Weston’s book, although aimed at directors, can offer much to the screenwriter. (Page 115)

Weston describes the analysis of a scene as starting with the director determining the “Scene Action” and then working out a “Scene Objective” for each character in the scene (i.e. what each character wants). As with *Chinatown* above, the drama within the scene is generated by having one character’s Scene Objective in conflict with that of the other character (in a scene with just two characters). The scene is then broken into “Unit Actions” with each character having a “Unit Objective”, and a new unit starts each time the Unit Objective of one (or both) of the characters changes.

For the above scene from *Chinatown*, the Scene Action might simply be described as: “Gittes confronts Evelyn Mulwray with what he knows”. There is then conflict between the two characters from the very start of the scene because their Scene Objectives are opposed to each other; Gittes wants to find out the truth from

Evelyn but at the same time she wants to hide her secret and escape with her daughter. Gittes' Unit Objective might start off the same as his Scene Objective and then stay the same for each "bit" of Unit Action, but Evelyn's may change from an initial Unit Objective of wanting to get rid of him, then to a Unit Objective of wanting to mislead him, and finally perhaps a Unit Objective of wanting him to understand.

The way a director uses this method to break down a scene and prepare it for the actors' input is a valuable tool in helping bring the screenplay to life, and often different directors will have different interpretations and breakdowns of exactly the same scene. Such an approach focuses on character and the drama of the scene within the structure of the whole film. Therefore, if writers were to use exactly the same approach to the actual creation of the scene it would no doubt assist them in writing the action and dialogue. For example, if the writer gets to a particular scene where "something happens" (i.e. there is a Story Event) such as the protagonist finding out the truth while the person he wants to find out the truth from has a Scene Objective of "she wants to tell him the truth", then both characters want the same thing and all he has to do is ask. There will be no conflict or drama in the scene. Faced with writing the scene this way the writer should probably decide to rethink the scene, not necessarily the Story Event itself but the way the scene is going to be written in terms of what each character initially wants.

Low-Budget Films

The "how-to" screenwriting books and scholarly publications referenced above focus almost exclusively on successful medium and high-budget films. Very little research has been conducted testing the accepted principles for writing a successful screenplay in relation to low-budget films. An exception is Alexander Munt's PhD thesis, "Assembling a Micro-Budget Digital Feature: Screenplays, Patterns & Practices" (2009). Here Munt examines "areas of neglect in analysis of the small scale, digital feature film", one of which is "the function of the screenplay" (Page 3), but then focuses on "alternative screenplay structures" rather than examine "act-paradigms, plot points or character arcs." (Page 10) In fact, he mounts a critique of "mainstream, manual-based, screenplay templates" (Page 105) and doesn't study any commercially successful low-budget films. He does, however, cite a study of twelve American "indie" films by J. J. Michael Murphy ("Me and You and Memento and Fargo: How Independent Screenplays Work" (2007)) which found that nine of the twelve did actually exhibit a three-act

structure, although some of these are not low-budget films - e.g. *Memento* (Director & Screenwriter: Christopher Nolan), with a budget of US$9 million (www.boxofficemojo.com), *Mulholland Drive* with an estimated budget of US$15 million (http://www.imdb.com), and *Fargo* (Director: Joel Coen, Screenwriters: Ethan Coen and Joel Coen, 1996) with a budget of US$7 million (www.boxofficemojo.com).

A discussion of low-budget films usually concerns "economics, projection, shooting style, lighting, digital manipulation, and transfer back to film; the script has not received much attention" (Dancyger and Rush, 2007, Page 320). For example, Robin Migdol's Master of Arts Thesis presented to the University of Southern California, "Screenwriting In The Digital Age" (2013), contains an interview with Richard Walter, a screenwriting professor at UCLA, who believes that because of new technologies in production and post-production, feature length movies can now be made on micro budgets if they have a self-contained story, limited locations, no car crashes and a short shooting schedule. In terms of screenplay "all you need is a great story". (Page 9) Similar advice is also found in many on-line articles about producing a low-budget film, such as "Shadow & Act's 5 Tips On Writing No-Budget/Low-Budget Feature Screenplays" by Tambay A. Obenson (2012), which recommends (i) keeping it simple with regards to wardrobe, props and equipment, (ii) only having a few characters, (iii) keeping locations to a minimum, (iv) not having too much dialogue, and (v) "having a script that's not too long". Similarly, "Three Steps To Writing Low Budget Screenplays" by Anna Kamp (2016) also recommends (i) limiting the locations, (ii) keeping the cast small, and (iii) "writing a dynamic script with great characters".

A recent publication by filmmaker, screenwriting lecturer and graduate of the American Film Institute, Joe Aaron ("The Low Budget Screenplay: How to Write a Produce-able Script", 2014) sets out to study the screenwriting process in relation to low-budget films but then focuses almost exclusively on the stories, characters, dialogue and themes of mainstream Hollywood films such as *Beverly Hills Cop, Die Hard, Star Wars, Terminator* (Director: James Cameron, Screenwriter: James Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd, 1984), *Back To The Future* (Director: Robert Zemeckis, Screenwriters: Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale, 1985) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Director: Steven Spileberg, Screenwriter: Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), while recommending that low-budget films should have similar story elements but fewer actors, fewer locations, fewer special effects, and be shorter (Page 61). The only low-budget film he analyses is one he wrote, directed, produced and starred in himself, *Crazy Jones* (Director and Screenwriter: Joe Aaron, 2002).

This pre-occupation with the screenplays of successful films in the medium-high budget range, and studies of low-budget filmmaking mainly concerning themselves with production requirements, has resulted in the analysis of screenplays in the low-budget area being underrepresented in the literature despite these films making up such a large proportion of the feature film industry (according to the B.F.I. report referenced above, approximately 66% of the films produced in the U.K. over a twelve year period had budgets less than £500,000 with the median budget of these films being just £200,000 (Page 98)).

Formulating a Model

The Literature Review has examined what a number of authors believe is the best formula for writing a successful mainstream film. By drawing on their disparate ideas about hero's journeys, character goals, the way a story is conveyed through its plot, and the way ideas can be expressed in films, a "Model" can be formulated which focuses on character, structure and theme. Such a Model is not a singular, uncontested paradigm which would be universally acknowledged in the profession as the only way a feature film should be structured. Instead, it integrates a number of possible approaches into a coherent guide for developing a feature film screenplay.

Character:

The literature invariably refers to a protagonist (or protagonists) who has both an external goal and an internal goal. In order to achieve their external goal the protagonist takes action but faces obstacles, most often in the form of an antagonist (or antagonists or antagonistic forces such as storms). The protagonist either achieves or doesn't achieve their goals by the end of the film.

Structure:

The three-act structure with two Plot Points is considered the most successful way of engaging an audience in the character's journey (or arc), the story and the theme(s) the film is exploring. Within this plot structure almost all authors agree there should be an Inciting Incident in the First Act and a Mid-point in the Second Act.

Theme:

Most authors believe the writer must know not only what their dominant theme is for the film they are writing, but also what their standpoint is on that particular theme. That is, the film must have something meaningful to say. Some authors call this the Controlling Idea.

This Model combines the work of a number of respected authors and contains basic elements a screenplay can exhibit in order to give it a good chance of being successful; first, by attracting a producer and the finance necessary to make it, and second, by providing the blueprint for a film which will attract an audience. The challenge for the screenwriter is how to develop such a screenplay.

Formulating a Development Plan

The Literature Review has not identified one agreed upon way of developing a screenplay. As discussed above (see Pages 25-28), authors such as Syd Field, Linda Seger, Vicki King and Blake Snyder all suggest different ways to start the development process and then divergent ways of proceeding to a first draft. By using principles and ideas gleaned from the Literature Review, however, a unique step-by-step development plan can be formulated in order to provide a precise method of constructing a screenplay which adheres to the above Model. These distinct stages are:

1. Answer the original idea's dramatic premise.
2. Create a Logline which identifies the protagonist, his/her internal and external goal, as well as the Inciting Incident and first Plot Point.
3. Develop this Logline into a Story Spine, then three-paragraph Synopsis which identifies the main genre and supporting genre, the three-act structure, the Mid-point and the second Plot Point, how the story will end, and the film's Controlling Idea.
4. Develop eight separate sequences within this three-act plot structure, with each sequence containing its own beginning, middle and end. This creates a Sequence Breakdown.
5. Develop each sequence into a series of scenes, wherever possible using opposing Scene Objectives for the characters in order to create conflict within the scene. This creates a Scene Breakdown.

6. Write the dialogue for each scene, thereby creating a First Draft screenplay.
7. Make your own assessment of this draft. Based on personal experience, the best way to do this is to leave the script for a while – e.g. two weeks – then read it in one sitting without taking notes until you've finished. This will indicate whether or not (i) the story engages the reader right from the start, and (ii) whether the plot's structure then holds the reader's attention at all times until the end. If it doesn't do both these things, then a Second Draft is written by cutting scenes, re-working scenes and adding new scenes in accordance with the Model, particularly with regard to structure.
8. Seek feedback on this Second Draft from people experienced in film analysis and then incorporate any constructive suggestions into a Third Draft.
9. Present this Third Draft to potential producers.

This staged development plan ensures the Model's specific parameters within the areas of character, structure and theme are all contained in the screenplay presented to the marketplace.

THE MODEL AND SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

This section examines the above screenwriting Model in relation to the plots of (i) high-budget science fiction films, and (ii) low-budget science fiction films.

The plots of five successful high-budget science fiction films, and one that has not been successful, will first be analysed, then the plots of three successful low-budget science fiction films, as well as one that has not been successful, will be analysed.

The Science Fiction Genre

"The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction" (2006) defines science fiction as "a genre (of literature, film, etc.) in which the setting differs from our own world (e.g. by the invention of new technology, through contact with aliens, by having a different history, etc.) and in which the difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions."

Science fiction films therefore employ plots involving phenomena which are yet to be proved by mainstream science, such as alien encounters, time travel, and the existence of parallel universes.

High-Budget Science Fiction Films

As discussed in the Literature Review, *Star Wars* is one of the most referenced films when it comes to providing an example of a screenplay for a successful film. Now known as *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, it was produced on a reasonably high budget (US$44 million when adjusted to today's dollars (see Page 4 above)) and has grossed to date US$775 million in cinemas worldwide (www.boxofficemojo.com), as well as spawning one of the most successful franchises in cinema history.

According to Syd Field in "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting" (Third Edition, 1994), its plot structure follows exactly his ideal paradigm (Pages 57, 61, 68, 96, 132, 135) while Christopher Vogler in "The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers" (Third Edition, 2007) sees Luke Skywalker's character arc as closely following

the different stages of Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" (Pages 33, 39, 57, 68, 75, 86, 118, 138-139, 159, 161-162, 178, 207, 209, 231, 237, 285, 290, 331, 372).

In summary, the plot has a protagonist, Luke Skywalker, who makes a commitment at the end of Act One to follow Obi One Kenobi and rescue the Princess. This leads to the main action of the film in Acts Two and Three. Luke has both an external goal (he *wants* to rescue the Princess) and an internal goal (he *needs* to have self-worth as represented by his desire to be a Jedi Knight). There is also an antagonist - Darth Vader and the evil Empire – which has to be overcome. And like many of the films referenced in the Literature Review, Luke Skywalker achieves his goal at the end of the Second Act so that in the Third Act his external goal changes from one of wanting to rescue the Princess to wanting to destroy the Death Star. Finally, the film's Controlling Idea is clearly: "When good people band together (Cause) they can overcome evil (Value)."

The immediate success of the film, however, cannot be solely attributed to its screenplay and its adherence to the Model articulated above. Its direction, production design, cast, music, visual effects, etc. were all major contributors. It was also released just after a number of science fiction films with serious socio-political themes at the core of their stories – e.g. *The Omega Man* (Director: Boris Sagal, Screenwriters: John William Corrington and Joyce H. Corrington, 1971), *Silent Running* (Director: Douglas Trumbull, Screenwriters: Deric Washburn, Mike Cimino, and Steve Bochco, 1972)*, Z.P.G.* (Director: Michael Campus, Screenwriters: Frank De Felitta and Max Ehrlich, 1972), *Soylent Green* (Director: Richard Fleisher, Screenwriter: Stanley R. Greenberg, 1973), and *Logan's Run* (Director: Michael Anderson, Screenwriter: David Zelag Goodman, 1976). These films portrayed an overpopulated future or one in which the world has been environmentally damaged beyond repair because of human activity, and often they had an ending where the protagonist did not survive (e.g. in *Silent Running* he blows himself up in order to save the last forest being kept alive in a huge dome in outer space). *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, on the other hand, had a sense of fun and adventure, as well as a happy ending which offered an escape from worrying social issues and appealed to an audience seeking engagement and entertainment. Its Controlling Idea was much more positive than one which basically said we are all doomed and there's little we can do about it. Like its updated title states, it offered hope.

A more recent science fiction film which does deal with socio-political issues and has been both a critical and commercial success is *District 9* (Director: Neill Blomkamp,

Screenwriters: Neill Blomkamp and Terri Tatchell, 2009). It was produced on an estimated budget of US$30 million and grossed US$211 million worldwide, while being nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay and Best Motion Picture of the Year (www.boxofficemojo.com).

In terms of character and plot structure, the protagonist is Wikus van de Werwe, a South African bureaucrat who is appointed by a private military company to manage a relocation of extra-terrestrials living in "District 9", a government camp just outside Johannesburg. This is the Inciting Incident and leads to the first Plot Point when Wikus accidentally sprays himself with a fluid being stored by one of the alien families. This gradually causes his body to deteriorate and become alien tissue, so his external goal becomes one of *wanting* to survive, while his internal goal right from the start of the film has been his *need* to become more "human" and less of a subservient bureaucrat.

Wikus' new DNA gives him the ability to use alien weapons and because of this the military try to vivisect him. This is the Mid-point but he is able to escape and now the obstacle to his external goal is not only the deterioration of his body, it's the military company who wants to kill him. When Wikus discovers there is a cure for what is happening to him on the alien spacecraft hovering above the city, this gives him hope. But the second Plot Point then occurs when the aliens decide to return to their own planet to get help to save their people and not take him. Act Three is then a climactic battle between Wikus, who is now on the side of the aliens, and the military. Wikus is victorious and the spacecraft flies off to get help, promising to return in three years with a cure for him as he has now physically turned into an alien. He has therefore achieved his external goal of wanting to survive while his need to be more human has now been achieved as well, ironically, by becoming an alien.

District 9 is a well-structured science fiction film with a strong character arc, the plot of which closely follows the Model. It also has a powerful and timely message about the treatment of refugees expressed through the Controlling Idea: "If you put yourself in the same shoes as refugees (Cause) you will have empathy for them (Value)".

Three more recent science fiction films, each with production budgets around US$100 million, have also been successful at the box office; *Oblivion* (Director: Joseph Kosinski, Screenwriters: Karl Gajdusek and Michael deBruyn, 2013) with a worldwide gross of US$286 million, *Elysium* (Director and Screenwriter: Neill Blomkamp, 2013) also with a worldwide gross of US$286 million, and *Edge of Tomorrow* (Director: Doug Liman, Screenwriters: Christopher McQuarrie, Jez Butterworth, and John-Henry Butterworth,

2014) with a worldwide gross of US$370 million (www.boxofficemojo.com). These films all follow the above Model very closely with a protagonist (played by Tom Cruise, Matt Damon and Tom Cruise respectively) who has a clearly defined external and internal goal, one or both of which is achieved at the end of the film. A study of the plot structure of the films also reveals that each of them has an Inciting Incident, two Plot Points and a Mid-point within their three-act structure, as well as a Controlling Idea which is more positive than those pre-*Star Wars* science fiction films referenced above. For a more detailed analysis of *Oblivion*, *Elysium* and *Edge of Tomorrow,* see Appendix B.

One of the reasons these particular science fiction films stick so closely to the accepted formula for structuring a successful screenplay is no doubt due to the amount of money being spent on production costs and then marketing. With so much invested it makes sense the financiers would want the filmmakers to not take risks in terms of the characters, structure, theme, and casting (as well as a major Hollywood star in the lead role, each film has a well-known supporting cast including Morgan Freeman in *Oblivion*, Jodie Foster in *Elysium* and Emily Blunt in *Edge of Tomorrow*). It is also understandable that each film has a "happy" ending where the protagonist saves the world either literally or metaphorically. In all three films, the protagonist sacrifices his own life in order to do this, but in two of the films their character is able to continue beyond death because of the science fiction concept central to the film. In *Oblivion*, this concept is human cloning so that at the end of the film when the main character dies while destroying an alien spaceship, his clone is then seen in the epilogue's happy ending. In *Edge of Tomorrow*, the concept is time-travel, so even though the main character dies while blowing up the head alien, he is able to come back to life again when he time travels back a day. In the third film, *Elysium*, he sacrifices himself to save a little girl and at the same time "saves" the world by making it a better place. His character doesn't continue on, but the film ends on a positive note when we see that the little girl has survived and that the previous divide between rich and poor has now been broken down because of the protagonist's heroics.

Another recent science fiction film, *Transcendence* (Director: Wally Pfister, Screenwriter: Jack Paglen, 2014), on the other hand, stars Johnny Depp and a strong supporting cast of Morgan Freeman, Rebecca Hall and Paul Bettany, had a production budget of US$100 million and a high-profile marketing campaign and wide-release, but only grossed US$103 million worldwide (www.boxofficemojo.com). After deduction of distribution and marketing costs, as well as exhibitors' costs, this represents a significant commercial failure. It is therefore an interesting example of what can go wrong when the film-makers *don't* follow the above Model's basic "rules ".

Transcendence is about a brilliant scientist, Will Caster (Johnny Depp), whose mind is uploaded onto a computer when he dies. The Inciting Incident is when he is fatally wounded by anti-technology activists and the first Plot Point is when his mind is uploaded. Act One establishes Caster as the protagonist and the terrorists as the antagonists. In Act Two his external goal is to be omniscient but he achieves this quite easily and starts to turn people into robots under his control. In order to stop him taking over the world, the terrorists now join forces with the F.B.I. and the U.S. military. As a result, the terrorists are now the protagonists and Caster is the antagonist. This means that at the start of the film the audience has been asked to identify with someone who turns out to be the "baddie" for almost the entire second half of the film. Furthermore, the Controlling Idea seems to be: "In order to make the world a better place (Value) you have to resort to terrorism (Cause)", and the film implies that the terrorists' action in killing Caster in the first place was justifiable. This dubious message was obviously difficult for a mainstream audience to accept.

In "Box Office Gold: Why Some Movies Go Through the Roof and Others Sink Without Trace", Tefay identifies the film's fundamental plot problem:

> "*Transcendence* failed because the *idea* the movie used as a 1st Act Plot Point wasn't capable of driving a plot from beginning to end with a continuous series of obstacles and conflict that the main character had to confront in order to solve a problem that had severe consequences." (Page 59)

An analysis of the above high-budget science fiction films – *Star Wars*, *District 9, Oblivion*, *Elysium, Edge of Tomorrow* and *Transcendence* - is consistent with the idea that the Model for writing a successful film applies to the plots of successful high-budget films in the science fiction genre.

Low-Budget Science Fiction Films

High-budget science fiction films are invariably aimed at a mainstream audience and released with the support of significant marketing "spends". Low-budget science fiction films, on the other hand, are produced with little finance and therefore can't rely on star actors and sophisticated visual effects. Their success, therefore, is highly dependent on the original idea and the quality of the screenplay. Three recently successful low-budget science fiction films provide good examples.

Safety Not Guaranteed (Director: Colin Trevorrow, Screenwriter: Derek Connolly, 2012) was produced on a reported budget of only US$750,000 (www.thefilmcollaborative.org/blog/tag/sundance-2012/) and grossed US$4 million in cinemas worldwide. On IMDb it has a rating of 7/10 from 108,955 IMDb users who have voted for it (www.imdb.com). Internationally it has won 7 awards and received 18 nominations, including the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award and a Grand Jury Prize nomination at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival. Because of the success of the film, Colin Trevorrow was offered the director's role on *Jurassic World* (Director: Colin Trevorrow, Screenwriters: Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Colin Trevorrow, and Derek Connolly, 2015) with a production budget of US$150 million (www.boxofficemojo.com).

The plot of *Safety Not Guaranteed* focuses on a disillusioned magazine intern, Darius, who "expects the worst and tries not to get her hopes up". The Inciting Incident is a classified advertisement in a newspaper placed by someone seeking a companion to time travel. Darius is then sent on assignment with two of her colleagues to a small coastal town to interview Kenneth, the grocery store clerk who placed the ad. The first Plot Point occurs when she makes contact with Kenneth and he agrees to train her in preparation for a journey back in time with him. This triggers her external goal of *wanting* to find out "if this guy is for real" while her internal goal from the start of the film has been her *need* to have a more positive outlook on life.

When Darius meets the apparently-crazy-but-endearing Kenneth, she becomes intrigued by him and the Mid-point is when she starts to have romantic feelings for him. This complicates things for her, mainly because she hasn't yet told him she's a journalist, but does not progress her efforts to find out whether he is "for real". It also does not advance her need to achieve her internal goal because if he turns out to be completely mad she will be back to her old negative self again. The second Plot Point then occurs when she confronts Kenneth for lying to her about his reason for going back in time and he finds out she's a journalist. This tests their relationship and makes her decision to trust him even more difficult. Finally, however, she decides to go with him and in the last scene she discovers that he is not delusional and can actually travel back in time, thereby achieving both her external and internal goal.

Safety Not Guaranteed engages an audience because of its carefully structured plot which places the audience in exactly the same position as the protagonist; not knowing whether to trust Kenneth or not, but wanting to believe that he can indeed travel through time. The ending therefore not only rewards the protagonist for her faith in him, it rewards the audience as well.

Another Earth (Director: Mike Cahill, Screenwriters: Mike Cahill and Brit Marling, 2011) is a science fiction film with a lower budget than *Safety Not Guaranteed*, with the director stating in an interview that it was made for approximately US$100,000 (http://www.avclub.com/article/mike-cahill-59293). Despite its lack of stars and modest production values, the film was picked up by Fox Searchlight Pictures for international release and then grossed US$1.7 million worldwide theatrically. It won 7 awards and was nominated for another 13, including winning the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize and the Special Jury Prize at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival, while the screenplay won the award for Best Writing presented by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA. On IMDb it has a rating of 7/10 as voted by 82,082 IMDb users (www.imdb.com).

Another Earth is about a young woman, Rhoda, who drives home intoxicated on the night an approaching planet is discovered which looks exactly like Earth. She crashes into another car and kills a mother and her son, while putting the father, John, in a coma. This is the first act set-up with the crash being the Inciting Incident that changes Rhoda's world forever. After serving her prison sentence, she makes contact with John and becomes his cleaner without revealing who she is. This is the first Plot Point as she now seeks her external goal of *wanting* him to forgive her. At the same time, her internal goal is that she *needs* to accept what she did and move on. The antagonist stopping her achieving both these goals is John, although he doesn't know it.

The Mid-point of the plot, like the Mid-point of *Safety Not Guaranteed,* occurs when the male and female characters start to develop romantic feelings for each other. This places a significant obstacle in the way of Rhoda achieving her external goal because John still doesn't know she is responsible for the death of his family, so if he finds out now it will be even more difficult for him to forgive her, not only for what she did but also for deceiving him.

Meanwhile, the other Earth has been moving closer and it's discovered that it's identical to our Earth. The second Plot Point then occurs when Rhoda wins a competition to be one of the first explorers to travel to this other Earth and John asks her not to go. She now reveals the truth about herself and he kicks her out his life.

In the final act Rhoda discovers that although everyone on Earth has an identical other on the other Earth, they might have only had identical lives up to the moment they learnt of the other's existence. She therefore decides to give her ticket to John,

telling him that his wife and son might still be alive on the other Earth. John accepts the gift and travels to the other Earth.

Months later, Rhoda sees her identical self from the other Earth standing right in front of her, looking healthy and happy, and the film ends. This implies that on the other Earth she didn't accidentally kill John's family and didn't subsequently give her ticket to him.

Another Earth features a protagonist struggling to come to terms with one terrible mistake she made when she was young. We see her efforts to make amends and she gives John hope by hypothesizing that his wife and child might be alive on the other Earth. Her external goal is then symbolically achieved when John accepts her offer of the ticket and later she sees on the television news that this has made him happy. At the end of the film, she is then presented with proof that on the other Earth her other self didn't make the same mistake she made on the night of the crash, so she is not inherently bad and this knowledge will make it easier for her to finally accept what has happened and move on. Given the shocking start, then Rhoda's guilt and John's grief throughout the film, the way the plot is finally resolved is very positive.

Coherence (Director and Screenwriter: James Ward Byrkit, 2013) was made on a reported budget even lower than *Another Earth*, estimated to be approximately US$50,000. It was shot in just five days at the director's house and features an ensemble cast of relatively unknown actors. It was released theatrically in the U.S.A. and grossed US$102,617 (www.boxofficemojo.com), while being distributed internationally on DVD, iTunes, Amazon, Pay Television, etc. It won 5 awards and was nominated for 4 others, including winning Best Screenplay at the 2013 Austin Film Festival and the Jury Award and Best Screenplay at the 2013 Sitges International Film Festival. On IMDb it has a rating of 7.2/10 from 79,449 IMDb users (www.imdb.com). Given its extremely low budget, these results qualify it as a successful film.

Like *Safety Not Guaranteed* and *Another Earth*, *Coherence* has a "high-concept" premise as eight friends at a dinner party discover there is an identical dinner party being held just down the street with their identical selves in attendance. Although the film has multiple characters, the plot starts with one of them, Em, and ends with her. Of the eight, she is the main protagonist and early on in the film it is established that her relationship with her boyfriend is at the point where she has to make a decision about going overseas with him or not, but she is procrastinating. She provides the central focus of a very complicated plot which sets up her and the other seven characters in the

First Act and has as its Inciting Incident the power in the area going out as a comet passes close to Earth. This leads to the first Plot Point when they discover their other selves just down the street. The Mid-point for Em is when she starts to suspect her boyfriend still has feelings for his ex-girlfriend. That is, their relationship starts to fall apart, unlike *Safety Not Guaranteed* and *Another Earth* where the central relationship of the film develops into a romantic connection at this point in the film. The second Plot Point then occurs when Em discovers there is not just one identical dinner party, there are multiple variants. This leads her to look for another version of the dinner party where she and her boyfriend are happy together. When she finally finds the right one, she kills her other self in order to replace her in that particular parallel world.

Em's external goal in the film is the same as her friends at the dinner party; she *wants* to find out what is going on. But her internal goal is different to each of the other characters; she *needs* to find contentment. When she achieves her external goal by discovering there are multiple versions of herself in different houses at different dinner parties (at the end of the Second Act), she is then able to achieve her internal goal in the Third Act by stealing the identity of one of these other selves, a more successful and happier version of herself.

Coherence has eight well-defined characters, but the plot and the way the film is directed focuses the audience's attention on Em and her character's journey. Those in the audience that identify with her are not rewarded with a happy ending because she becomes quite ruthless in order to achieve her internal goal. The final scenes, however, are simply implying, like *Another Earth*, that we would all change our lives for the better if given the chance. That is, it's saying the opposite to: "I wouldn't change a thing." This message obviously resonates with a lot of viewers who have seen the film and given it a high rating on IMDb. The film's ending must have also been dramatically satisfying to the industry judges who awarded the film and the screenplay various prestigious awards.

An analysis of these low-budget science fiction films - *Safety Not Guaranteed*, *Another Earth* and *Coherence* – demonstrates that each of their plots closely follows the Model for a successful high-budget film. A recent low-budget science fiction film which has *not* been successful, however, especially when compared to these three films, is *Counter Clockwise* (Director: George Moise, Screenwriters: Michael Kopelow and George Moise, 2016). According to Moise, it was produced with a very small crew of friends on a "micro budget" (http://discoverfilm.net/2017/09/29/episode-14-george-moise). The film has not been released in cinemas in any country, being restricted to a DVD and

Video-On-Demand release only. Its rating on IMDb is a low 4.3/10 from only 185 IMDb users who have voted for it (www.imdb.com). This number of votes indicates a very small number of people who have seen it compared to the high numbers associated with the three low-budget science fiction films above. Although receiving some reasonably positive reviews, it has received mainly negative reviews, including one from sci-fi/horror film critic Michael Klug who gave it only half a star out of five and described its plot as "all over the place and frankly confusing". (http://horrorfreaknews.com/counter-clockwise-2016-review/14539)

Counter Clockwise is about a scientist who accidentally discovers time travel and travels six months into the future where he finds himself in a sinister world where his wife and his sister have been murdered and he's the main suspect. This is a "high-concept" premise for a low-budget science fiction film because it immediately suggests a strong external goal for the protagonist of wanting to go back in time and solve the crime before it actually happens. Unfortunately, however, the way the story is told does not adhere to the above Model and this causes a number of problems.

The First Act introduces the protagonist, Ethan, who has developed a transportation machine with another scientist. There are then two Inciting Incidents rather than just one. The first occurs when Ethan tests the machine on his dog and it disappears. He then tests the machine on himself, but his motivation for doing this is never explained. Ethan then finds himself in a world where his wife and his sister have been murdered. This is a second Inciting Incident, rather than a Plot Point, however, because he hasn't yet realized that he is now six months in the future. When he finally does it triggers his external goal to go back in time and stop the murders. This is 38 minutes into a 90 minute film and makes the First Act far too long. In the Second Act, rather than have a plan to stop the murders, he spends a lot of time telling first his mother what is going on, then his colleague, then his sister. He doesn't actually find out anything new until the 52 minute mark. This Second Act also introduces the antagonists, ruthless criminals who are trying to kill Ethan, but it's not clear what they want. The Mid-point occurs at the 63 minute mark (i.e. two-thirds of the way into the film rather than in the middle section) when he is too late to stop the murders and sees his wife and sister are dead. So he goes back in time to try again. This creates multiple versions of himself and it becomes very difficult to identify with any one of them. At the 72 minute mark he finds out his sister is working with the antagonists. This is the second Plot Point and leads to a Third Act where he confronts the antagonists, but they tie him up and make him watch his wife being murdered, then his sister being shot and raped and finally killed too. Eventually Ethan breaks free but it is too late. The chief antagonist

has escaped and the film ends with Ethan stepping back into his time machine, presumably to try yet again.

One of the Model's basic principles is a plot involving a protagonist with both an external goal and an internal goal. *Counter Clockwise's* Ethan has a clear external goal but frustratingly he never achieves it. At the same time, he has no identifiable internal goal. The ending is therefore not dramatically satisfying. Meanwhile, the plot has a three-act structure but the First Act is far too long, while the Third Act does not resolve the conflict. The antagonists get away with murder and it's never explained why they were trying to kill Ethan in the first place. Finally, there doesn't appear to be a Controlling Idea guiding the plot. The film might be saying that "you can't change the past", or perhaps: "You can't leave the past behind no matter how hard you try", but this makes our "hero's" efforts to achieve his goal a waste of time. And without a clearly defined Controlling Idea to shape the way the conflict is resolved at the end of their film, the film-makers resort to the "drama" of a completely gratuitous rape scene.

Conclusion

The study of a sample of science fiction films has demonstrated that the Model's principles, which have been shown to work so well for writing successful high-budget films, can also correlate with the success of high-budget science fiction films and low-budget science fiction films. Even though the sample is small, it is none-the-less useful, and does provide some level of insight.

First, low-budget films are able to take more creative risks than high-budget films simply because of the amount of money involved. This might suggest they *have* to take risks in order to set them apart from standard Hollywood fare and therefore attract a niche audience, but an analysis of the three successful low-budget science fiction films above demonstrates that each of them has a plot which closely follows the Model and this is perhaps a major contributor to their success, especially since the screenplay for each of the three films either won, or was nominated for, film industry awards. Meanwhile, a low-budget science fiction film which did not adhere to the Model has not been a commercial or critical success.

Second, the Literature Review found that very little research has been conducted testing the accepted principles for writing a successful screenplay in relation to low-budget films. This study contributes to the field and suggests that further work in the area could provide a valuable contribution to the analysis of screenplays and the

screenwriting process by examining a wider range of low-budget science fiction films, as well as low-budget films in other genres.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The above research indicates that the screenplay Model outlined on Pages 34-35 can be advantageously applied to the writing of a low-budget science fiction film. This next section outlines how the development plan formulated on Pages 35-36 was applied to a creative work.

The creative work associated with this exegesis is the screenplay for a high-concept low-budget science fiction film called *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson.*

It's "high-concept" because it has an easily pitched premise and can be produced on a low budget because of its contemporary setting in easy-to-access locations, a relatively small cast and little requirement for visual effects.

The genre is science fiction because the story is based on a speculative hypothesis regarding the existence of parallel worlds (or "parallel universes") which was first proposed by physicist Hugh Everett III in 1957. His "many-worlds interpretation" ("A Dictionary of Physics", 2015) sees the universe as constantly multiplying into an enormous number of possible worlds of which ours is one example, although this phenomenon has not been proved by mainstream science.

In science fiction literature and films, these parallel worlds are portrayed as self-contained realities co-existing with one's own, and are invariably separated from each other by a single event in the past. For example, in the television series *The Man In The High Castle* (2015-), this single event is Nazi Germany winning the Second World War, thus creating a parallel world which differs markedly from our own. In *The Butterfly Effect* (2004) a young man can change significant single events in his past and therefore alter the rest of his life in that particular parallel world.

Stage 1: Answering the original idea's dramatic premise

The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson started with the idea of someone being transported to a parallel world and the single event in the past being their murder by someone who is yet to be caught. As Selbo notes; "Science fiction narratives have a

unique reliance on the 'what if' question," (Page 148) and in *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* the dramatic premise of the story can be expressed as: "What if you were transported to a parallel world where you had once been murdered and the murderer never caught?" As discussed in the Literature Review, the formulation of the premise in this way doesn't advance development of the screenplay, it merely rephrases the original idea as a question.

Selbo advises that "the plot of a science fiction film based on a speculative scientific hypothesis should explore the possible or plausible elements that follow *logically* from the base premise." (Page 154) So in *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* a plausible element that follows logically from the premise would be Emily's desire to find out who killed her.

That is, in order to take the first step in the development process the dramatic premise needs to be answered, and in response to the "what would you do?" question above, the answer would logically be: "Find out who did it."

Stage 2: Creating a Logline

The next step is to develop a Logline; a single sentence which identifies the main character, what their goal is and what's standing in their way.

A female character was chosen to be the protagonist and her boyfriend the antagonist. This was done for casting reasons as the screenplay was to be written with a particular Australian actress in mind. However, it is interesting to note that all six of the high-budget science fiction films referenced above have male protagonists, while each of the three successful low-budget science fiction films has a female protagonist.

After a number of drafts, the following Logline was developed:

> *A young woman investigates her own murder when she is transported to a parallel world where she was killed when she was just 14 years-old and the case never solved.*

This defined the protagonist's external goal and the action driving the story (her investigation), as well as her antagonist (the murderer), but not her internal goal. An alternative Logline was therefore developed:

> *A troubled young woman who doesn't care if she lives or dies finds a reason to live when she is transported to a parallel world where she no longer exists.*

This second Logline was based on the idea of her going into the parallel world when she lapses into a coma after drinking too much and taking too many sleeping pills. It expresses an internal goal of *needing* to find meaning in her life.

Combining these two Loglines then resulted in one which defines the protagonist's external goal as well as her internal goal:

> *A young woman, who doesn't care if she lives or dies, finds a reason to live when she investigates her own murder, after being transported to a parallel world where she was killed when she was 14 years-old, and the case never solved.*

Henry Tefay's criteria that the Logline should contain the central idea of the movie and that the idea itself has to be the 1st Plot Point (see Pages 27-28 above) then points to the protagonist's discovery of her own murder as being the first Plot Point, while her being transported to a parallel world is the prior Inciting Incident.

Before developing the concept further, research was conducted into various theories regarding the possibility of parallel worlds. This first led to the idea of the main character dying and going into another world which is her after-life, but this then changed while researching the work of Joseph Campbell.

As the diagram for "The Hero's Journey" on Page 20 shows, Campbell divides the setting of the hero's story into the "Known" world and the "Unknown" world. In Freudian terms, this is the equivalent of the "Conscious" world and the "Unconscious" world as depicted in Dan Harmon's "Story Structure Circle" on Page 21. This triggered the idea that rather than dying, the protagonist lapses into a coma during which her mind is transported to the parallel world of her unconscious. And then, following the "Story Structure Circle", at the end of the film she comes out of her coma and regains consciousness. That is, the beginning, middle and end of the plot is her journey from one state, to another, then back to the original state.

The "Unknown" world the protagonist enters in her unconscious state was therefore imagined as being like a dream. The "Abyss: death and rebirth" story event which occurs at the bottom of "The Hero's Journey" diagram then suggested an additional "nightmare" state even deeper within her unconscious. Such a scene, or

sequence, would therefore be located in the middle of the "dreamlike" state she's in and could draw on archetypal images of horror, before the plot returns to her "dreamlike" state again.

Stage 3: Developing a Story Spine and three-paragraph Synopsis

The following Story Spine was developed according to Rule 4 of "Pixar's 22 Rules of Story" (see Page 29 above):

Once upon a time there was – a young woman called Emily.

Every day – she would support her boyfriend.

One day – they fought and she didn't care if she lived or died.

Because of that – she drank too much and took too many pills.

Because of that - she lapses into a coma and her mind is transported to a parallel world where she was murdered when she was 14 years-old and the case never solved.

Because of that – she investigates her own murder.

Until eventually – she discovers that her boyfriend had killed her.

This identified the supporting genre as "mystery-thriller" because the protagonist undertakes an investigation into an unsolved crime and the audience solves the mystery at the same time as she does, while her actions put her life in danger.

Applying Pixar's Rule 22 (Pages 29-30 above), the essence of the story was further developed into the following three-paragraph Synopsis:

"The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson" is a science fiction mystery-thriller about a troubled young woman who is emotionally smothered by her boyfriend. She seeks an escape by taking a combination of alcohol and Rohypnol and lapses into a coma. Her mind is then transported to a parallel world where she was murdered when she was 14 years-old and the case never solved.

> *In this other world, she sets out to find her killer but in doing so she puts herself in danger. At the same time, however, she learns how precious life is and finds a reason to live.*
>
> *When she discovers that her boyfriend is the murderer, he tries to kill her again but she desperately fights for her life. They both die and she comes out of her coma and back into the real world only to find him keeping vigil by her hospital bed. But her experience has made her stronger and she is now finally able to leave him forever.*

In developing this Synopsis, Emily's internal goal was modified. In the Logline, she *needed* to find a reason to live, but it was decided this would automatically occur as soon as she set out to find her killer. Therefore, the idea of her being emotionally smothered by her controlling boyfriend arose and this suggested an internal goal of her *needing* to be independent. This is then achieved at the end of the above Synopsis when she is now *stronger and… able to leave him forever*. Her character arc is then a journey from an emotional state of insecure dependency to one of self-possession.

As noted in the Literature Review, the dramatic question is often answered at the end of the Second Act and a new dramatic question arises. The dramatic question that first arises in the above Synopsis is: "Will Emily find her killer?" When she discovers it's her boyfriend it is then: "Will Emily survive?" This pointed to the discovery of her murderer's identity as the second Plot Point, while the resolution in the Third Act answers the new dramatic question by having her die in the "Unknown" world but survive in the "Known" world.

The above Synopsis also suggested a possible Mid-point. Emily's goal in the Second Act is to find the person who killed her in the parallel world in which she now finds herself, but at some point her killer is going to discover she is trying to track him down and therefore try to stop her. If he does this by attempting to kill her, then this would represent an ideal Mid-point because it takes the story in another direction while not changing the external goal of the protagonist.

Drawing on Christopher Vogler's work, this Mid-point might consist of an "Approach to the Inmost Cave" and an "Ordeal". The "Approach" could then be her getting close to and then entering the "most dangerous spot in the Special World" (Vogler, 2007, Page 14), while the "Ordeal" could be when the murderer tries to kill her and she faces "the possibility of death and is brought to the brink in a battle with a

hostile force" (Vogler, 2007, Page 15). In order for the second Plot Point to still be the revelation of who the murderer is, it was important to construct these scenes so that Emily is attacked by someone she (and the audience) is unable to see clearly, a "Dark Figure". At the same time, the "Ordeal" seemed the ideal point to place the "nightmare" scene discussed above whereby her mind entered a state where her worst fears were visualized.

Finally, the above Synopsis pointed to a Controlling Idea related to Emily's internal goal of needing to be independent. Her experience in the "Unknown" world has expressed her unconscious fear of what's deep inside her boyfriend's nature; that he is capable of murdering her. This results in her finally seeing clearly in the "Known" world the effect he is having on her and that in order to survive psychologically she must leave him forever. The Controlling Idea can therefore be expressed as: "In order to escape an unhealthy relationship (Value) you first have to perceive the toxic effect it's having on you (Cause)." That is, just like the first step in treating alcoholism is to admit you are an alcoholic, this idea should be easily understood by an audience.

Stage 4: Developing a Sequence Breakdown

As discussed in the Literature Review, Paul Joseph Gulino (2004) divides the plot of a successful feature film into eight sequences (see Pages 12-13 above). In order to develop *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* according to this structure, it was separated into two sequences in Act One, four sequences in Act Two, and two sequences in Act Three. And following Gulino, each sequence had its own protagonist, tension, rising action and resolution, with conflicts and issues either partly being resolved by the end of the sequence or the resolution creating new conflict and issues which then had to be dealt with in the next sequence. This resulted in the following Sequence Breakdown:

The first sequence introduces the protagonist and ends on the Inciting Incident. (Gulino, Page 14)

This section of the plot introduces Emily to the audience as the protagonist and sets up her "Conscious", or "Known", world; she has a controlling boyfriend, Stephen, and because of him, she has low self-esteem. Her internal goal is her *need* to be an independent spirit again like she used to be when she was a teenager. A scene where we first see her as a teenager was therefore created, then we cut to ten years later and see her as an adult. She has just had an argument with her boyfriend and escaped to her

parents' place in the country where she was once happy. Upset and unable to get to sleep, she drinks too much and then takes too many sleeping pills. Because of this, she lapses into a coma and is transported to a parallel, or "Unknown", world. (the Inciting Incident)

> *The second sequence sets up the dramatic question that will shape the rest of the picture and ends with the first Plot Point. (Gulino, Page 15) Here the dramatic question is: "Will Emily find her killer?" which is set up by Emily's discovery of her own grave (the first Plot Point).*

Emily finds herself in a country hospital recovering from an overdose. A psychologist, Catherine Asmussen, is assigned to her case and when Emily says her name is "Emily Wilkinson" and that she remembers Catherine from when she counselled her at high school, Catherine immediately becomes concerned for Emily's mental health. She takes Emily back to Emily's parents' place but there is now a lake where their house used to be. Emily suffers an anxiety attack and Catherine offers to help her find out what is going on. Catherine visits the manager of the dam which has been built to form the lake and discovers that it was constructed after Emily Wilkinson's parents sold their property to the water authority and moved to a nursing home where eventually they died. Catherine then takes Emily to the cemetery where they are buried and here Emily is shocked to also find the grave of "Emily Wilkinson" who died when she was 14 years-old. (Plot Point 1)

> *The third sequence sees the protagonist attempt to solve the problem that arose at the end of the previous sequence. This either fails or is resolved in such a way that a bigger problem arises. (Gulino, Page 15)*

To find out what is going on, Emily and Catherine go to the local police station and here discover that Emily Wilkinson was murdered and the case never solved. This triggers Emily's external goal of wanting to find the killer. But Emily's world is now falling apart and she distrusts both the police and Catherine, especially when she realizes Catherine knew something strange was going on when she first met her at the hospital. So she runs away from Catherine and heads to the city to make contact with Stephen. She tracks him down but he has no idea who she is. When she tells him she's Emily Wilkinson he thinks she's completely mad and they have a vicious argument. Upset that he was not able to help her in any way, Emily returns to the country hospital and asks for Catherine's help.

In the fourth sequence the protagonist tries to solve the new problem or tries to solve the original problem a different way, and this sequence ends at the Mid-point. (Gulino, Pages 15-16)

Emily tries to solve the murder case and discovers that there were two prime suspects; one was a country policeman she has already met, Graham Sinclair, while the other was a weird hermit by the name of Edward Vaughan. She first goes to see Sinclair, and then Vaughan. This is now her "Approach to the Inmost Cave" as Vaughan's house is in a remote and dark area at the edge of a national forest. When she meets him, he forces her down into his basement cellar. Here she is able to escape, but when she is speeding away from his house, she is hit by a car from behind. This forces her off the road and she crashes into a tree, knocking herself unconscious. Her mind then enters a second parallel world and here she experiences a terrifying "Ordeal" in which she is dragged through the forest by a Dark Figure and then buried alive. (Mid-point)

In the fifth sequence the protagonist deals with whatever new complications arose at the Mid-point. (Gulino, Page 16)

Emily comes back out of this nightmarish world when she regains consciousness in her crashed car. But whoever ran her off the road now chases her through the forest. It is the Dark Figure and she can't see who he is, but eventually she reaches a safe place. Having survived the "Ordeal", she breaks down and starts crying with a mixture of physical exhaustion and an overwhelming sense of being alive.

The sixth sequence results in the dramatic question being answered at the second Plot Point. (Gulino, Pages 16-17)

Lost in the forest at night, Emily encounters Edward Vaughan who takes her back to his place where he says he will call the police. But when Emily and Vaughan arrive there, the Dark Figure appears again and kills Vaughan. This Dark Figure is then revealed to be Emily's boyfriend, Stephen, thus answering the dramatic question of: "Will Emily find her killer?" (Plot Point 2)

The seventh sequence then sees the protagonist trying to resolve the new dramatic question and at the end of this sequence there is often a major twist. (Gulino, Page 17)

The new dramatic question is: "Will Emily survive?" At the point where it looks like Stephen will kill her, Sinclair and Catherine arrive in a police car. Stephen then kills Sinclair and is about to kill Catherine too when Emily makes a "crisis decision" (Robert McKee, 1997, Page 304) and sacrifices her own life by running straight at Stephen and forcing both him and herself over the edge of a cliff. They plunge into a river which runs into the lake and here both Emily and Stephen drown. However, this causes Emily to wake up in her "Conscious", or "Known", world and again she finds herself in the country hospital. But this time it's the real world and her mother and father are there. They are alive, but so is Stephen.

> *The eighth and final sequence leads to the final resolution and then, quite often, an epilogue which ties up any loose ends (e.g. an unresolved subplot). (Gulino, Page 18)*

Emily apologizes to her mother and father for causing them so much pain, then asks them to wait outside while she talks to Stephen alone. She then tells him how she has been emotionally smothered by him and that the only way she can be happy is to be free of him forever. He finally leaves the room and Emily achieves her internal goal of needing to be independent. In the final scene, she then calls Catherine and they make arrangements to see each other so Emily can tell Catherine her story.

Plot v Story:

In order to outline the above plot in relation to its story, a diagram was formulated similar to the one at Appendix C for *Memento* and those found at http://www.dorkly.com/post/69992/10-infographics-that-make-sense-of-your-favorite-movies for films such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Inception* (Director and Screenwriter: Christopher Nolan, 2010). This portrayed the plot of *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* in a line of arrows (**>>>>>**) through Emily's three different states; Conscious, Dream and Nightmare:

	10 YEARS AGO		**THE PRESENT**		**THE END**
REAL WORLD (Conscious)	**[>>>>>>>>>>>>]**	(Time Jump)	**[>>>>>>>>>>>**		**>>>>>>>>>]**
PARALLEL WORLD 1 (Dream)	(Emily murdered)			**>>>>>>>>**	**>>>>>>>**
PARALLEL WORLD 2 (Nightmare)				**>>>>**	

The diagram gave rise to the idea of creating a story event in the Parallel World 1 sometime between Emily's murder and the present day. This resulted in Catherine being given a backstory of having a little daughter who died as a result of an accident on the lake (which was only formed in Parallel World 1 after Emily's parents sold their property following their daughter's murder and a dam subsequently constructed to flood the valley). Because the lake was never formed in the Real World it would mean Catherine's daughter never had the accident and is therefore still alive in the Real World. This gave Catherine an emotional backstory and led to an ending in which Emily would not only reconnect with Catherine, but one which also resolved the Catherine-daughter subplot and provided the audience with hopefully a final scene as dramatically satisfying as the one at the end of *Another Earth*.

Stage 5: Developing a Scene Breakdown

Each of the above sequences was then developed into a number of scenes with the events in each one summarized to form a Scene Breakdown. While doing this, lines of dialogue came to mind and were written in, but only to give an indication of what needed to be said in the scene either overtly or through subtext.

An excerpt of this Scene Breakdown follows, using the first sequence as the example. It was broken into two scenes; the first when Emily was a 14 year-old girl, and the second ten years later when she is 24 years-old:

> ***ACT ONE – THE SET-UP***
>
> ***The "Known" World….***
>
> *<u>Scene 1</u>:*
>
> *EMILY WILKINSON is 14 years-old. We see her going for a swim in an isolated rock pool at the bottom of her parents' country property. This is her own private sanctuary where she escapes to be alone.*
>
> *But she gets frightened when she senses someone spying on her.*
>
> *She then sees a DARK FIGURE hiding amongst the trees.*
>
> *She quickly swims back to the rocks where she left her belongings, picks them up and then runs up the track leading back to her home.*

The title fades in:

"THE STRANGE CASE OF EMILY WILKINSON"

Then fades out.

<u>Scene 2</u>:

Ten Years Later

24 year-old Emily sits on the edge of a bed, staring out the window as she watches the break of dawn. Her eyes are bloodshot and her cheeks tear-stained; she has been drinking all night and now can't go to sleep.

She is in her old bedroom, a teenager's room which her parents have kept the same since she left home when she was seventeen years-old. She is looking at the posters still hanging on her wall; they are of Maria Sharapova, Jessica Watson, Avril Lavigne, etc. – women she once admired and wanted to be like.

Emily picks up a small container of prescription pills from her bedside table. She empties the last of the pills into the palm of her hand and places them in her mouth. She then picks up a bottle of Wild Turkey, pours some into a glass and washes the pills down until there is no more bourbon left.

While calling someone on a mobile phone, she looks at the framed photographs sitting on top of her chest of drawers….

These show her and STEPHEN DALGLEISH from the time they were teenagers - smiling at camera while on a date, posing together at a school sports day, kissing each other at the school formal, etc.

At the same time we hear Stephen's voice on a recorded message:

"Hi, you've rung Stephen and Emily. We're not home at the moment. But please leave a message after the tone."

Beep.

"It's me…." says Emily, very quietly into her phone. "I'm at mum and dad's place…. Back in my old room… where once a teenage girl knew who she wanted to be. But I fell in love with you and slowly but surely you took that away from me. You controlled me, Stephen… smothered me… to the point where I don't

know who I am anymore. I love you, but you make me feel worthless, like I'm not good enough. And now that's all I'm left with. That's who I've become…."

The effect of the alcohol and the drugs now hits her and she drops the mobile phone on the floor.

Her head falls back on the pillow and she lies there looking straight at us - her eyes slightly open but not seeing anything.

We start moving away from her and realize she is now lying on her back on the bed and we are actually looking directly down on her from the ceiling.

We keep moving higher and notice something very strange…

She is now under water and her bedroom is under water too.

This is Emily's transition to the "Unknown" World (i.e. the Inciting Incident).

The next scene is then the start of the second sequence which eventually leads to the first Plot Point.

Constructing Each Scene:

Scenes between two or more characters were developed using techniques explored by Judith Weston in her book "Directing Actors; Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television" (1999) referred to in the Literature Review. This involved determining what the Scene Objective was for each character so they were in conflict. For example, in a key scene between Emily and Catherine it was decided to have Emily's Scene Objective as: "She wants to prove to Catherine that she's *not* crazy", while Catherine had an opposing Scene Objective: "She wants to prove to Emily that she *is* crazy". This created conflict in the scene with Emily trying to convince Catherine that what she is experiencing is real, while Catherine puts forward other, more rational, possibilities that if true would mean that Emily is suffering some form of psychotic breakdown. This heightened the drama in a scene which otherwise might have simply been one in which both Emily and Catherine agreed on the next course of action.

The Scene Breakdown was then developed over various drafts; deleting scenes, adding new scenes, moving scenes around, etc., but always following the blueprint of the Sequence Breakdown above. During this process more lines of dialogue were

included as they came to mind until eventually a Scene Breakdown was settled upon which closely followed the Model and other principles gleaned from the Literature Review.

Stage 6: From Scene Breakdown to First Draft

The final Scene Breakdown was quite detailed at 63 pages and 15,708 words. It was therefore a relatively straightforward process to turn this into a First Draft screenplay of 96 pages and 18,138 words. The main work occurred in refining the dialogue so that it was not as expositional as it was in the Scene Breakdown. For example, in the above scene where Emily leaves a message for Stephen on their answering machine, the dialogue was completely rewritten so that Emily was not aware of her emotional problem (and therefore her internal *need*) so early in the plot.

Stage 7: From First Draft to Second Draft

Once the First Draft was finished it was left alone for two weeks before being read again. Immediately a number of problems were evident, mainly at the start and the end of the screenplay. The set-up where Emily's "Known" world is established happened far too quickly. We didn't see her mother and her father in the first sequence despite them appearing at the end of the film when Emily regains consciousness in hospital and they are standing by her bed. Also, Emily's boyfriend, Stephen, was only introduced in the First Act through photos in Emily's old bedroom and a brief message on an answering machine. There was no sense of the way he controlled Emily. As a result of these obvious problems, the first sequence was expanded from the two scenes above to seven scenes in the Second Draft. As Robert McKee recommends, the Inciting Incident still occurred early in the plot (on Page 9 of the screenplay) but we now had a much better idea of Emily's world as a 24 year-old.

The final sequence was also developed further. In the First Draft, it was just two scenes. The first of these was Emily waking up in hospital and seeing her mother and father, then Stephen enters the room and Emily basically tells him to get lost because of her experiences in the "Unknown" world. The second scene in this sequence was then Emily calling Catherine at the end of which we see that Catherine's daughter is alive in this "Known" world. Again, this was far too rushed and didn't develop the potential drama of what had previously been set up. So the idea of Emily at first not remembering anything that happened in the "Unknown" world was incorporated into the screenplay.

This led to seven new scenes being created between the scene where Emily regains consciousness in the hospital and the one where she contacts Catherine.

Stage 8: From Second Draft to Third Draft

The Second Draft was sent to Henry Tefay who had offered to provide notes on the screenplay, as well as Dr. Damian Cox who wrote (with Michael P. Levine) "Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies" (2011). Both had constructive criticisms and valuable suggestions which were incorporated into a Third Draft, the main change being that the "Unknown" world Emily is transported to became more clearly a projection of her unconscious rather than a parallel world existing independently of Emily's "Known" world. In the final scene, however, there is still a suggestion that it was not "just a dream" and that it might have been a separate parallel world after all. This conclusion to the plot is based on an idea David Andrews believes is expressed in many of David Lynch's films, particularly *Mulholland Drive*; that our unconscious mind sometimes acts as a portal to parallel worlds, alternative realities which co-exist with the one we know, beyond the laws of nature. (Andrews, David, *An Oneiric Fugue: The Various Logics of Mulholland Drive*, 2004, Journal of Film & Video, 56(1), Page 32-33)

Stage 9: Seeking a Producer

The Third Draft screenplay was sent to an experienced producer I had worked with before, Mark Overett, whose credits include *Unfinished Sky* (Director: Peter Duncan, Screenwriters: Peter Duncan and Kees van der Hulst, 2007), *Separation City* (Director: Paul Middleditch, Screenwriter: Tom Scott, 2009) and *Iron Sky* (Director: Timo Vuorensola, Screenwriters: Michael Kalesniko and Timo Vuorensola, 2012), to see if he was interested in taking on the project. Mark is now attached as producer and is currently in the process of presenting the project to sales agents, distributors and financiers in the international marketplace.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

A review of the literature relating to screenwriting examined numerous theories of how to write a screenplay. This revealed a number of different principles which were evaluated, assessed, tested against each other, and finally integrated to form a screenwriting Model for a successful film. This involves a protagonist with both an external goal and an internal goal, an antagonist, a three-act plot structure, an Inciting Incident, two Plot Points and a Mid-point, as well as a Controlling Idea. Further research suggested that this Model could be combined with the work of Joseph Campbell, Sigmund Freud, Konstantin Stanislavski and Judith Weston to construct a well-structured screenplay for a potentially engaging film.

The creative work associated with this exegesis is the screenplay for a low-budget science fiction film called *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson.* In order to determine whether or not the above Model could be advantageously applied to the development of this particular project, five successful high-budget science fiction films were first studied. This demonstrated that the Model formed, to some extent, the basis of each of these films' plots, while a high-budget science fiction film which did not adhere to the Model's basic "rules" has been a commercial failure. Three successful low-budget science fiction films were then studied and in each case the Model was found to have applied, again to some extent, whereas a low-budget science fiction film which has not been successful did not follow the Model in any meaningful way. Researching these ten films indicated that there is a correlation between following the basic principles of successful screenplay construction, as presented in the Literature Review, and the subsequent success of both high-budget and low-budget science fiction films.

From the Literature Review, a step-by-step development plan was formulated as a precise guide for the construction of a screenplay which would contain all the different elements of the Model. This consists of nine distinct stages and was used to take *The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson* from its original idea through to a Third Draft ready to present to the marketplace with a producer attached. The first step was to answer the idea's dramatic premise, then create a Logline which identified the protagonist, her internal and external goal, as well as the Inciting Incident and first Plot Point. The next step was to develop this Logline into a Story Spine and three-paragraph Synopsis. This process identified the hybrid genre, the three-act structure, the Mid-point and the

second Plot Point, as well as how the story would end. It also identified the film's Controlling Idea. All the elements comprising the Model were now in place in order to develop eight separate sequences within the three-act plot structure, with each sequence containing its own beginning, middle and end. Once this Sequence Breakdown was completed, a Scene Breakdown was constructed for the whole film, wherever possible using different Scene Objectives of characters to create conflict within a scene. The Scene Breakdown was then transformed into a First Draft screenplay by reworking and adding to the sample dialogue that had already been written for each scene. The screenplay was then deliberately left for a while before reading it again as if it was the first time. A number of problems were identified and these were then addressed in a Second Draft. The final step before presenting the screenplay to a producer was to write a Third Draft incorporating feedback from an experienced script editor and a respected film/philosophy academic.

The Strange Case of Emily Wilkinson is the result of extensive research into what is generally accepted as the best way to write a successful feature film screenplay. It is a low-budget science fiction film which follows the basic "rules" of character development and plot structure normally associated with high-budget films. It was written by following a step-by-step development plan specifically formulated from a number of different sources identified in the Literature Review. As such, it is a unique contribution to the genre.

If the screenplay is now able to attract the finance required to produce it, and this results in a successful film, this development plan can be used to generate other potentially successful projects in the future.

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FILM INDEX

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
Screenwriters: Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clark
Director: Stanley Kubrick

The African Queen (1951)
Screenwriters: James Agee and John Huston
Based on the novel by C. S. Forester
Director: John Huston

Alice In Wonderland (1951)
Writer: Lewis Carroll
Directors: Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson & Hamilton Luske

Alien (1979)
Screenwriter: Dan O'Bannon
Director: Ridley Scott

All The President's Men (1976)
Screenwriter: William Goldman
Based on the book by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward
Director: Alan J. Pakula

A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)
Screenwriter: Wes Craven
Director: Wes Craven

An Officer and a Gentleman (1982)
Screenwriter: Douglas Day Stewart
Director: Taylor Hackford

Another Earth (2011)
Screenwriters: Mike Cahill and Brit Marling
Director: Mike Cahill

Beverly Hills Cop (1984)
Screenwriter: Daniel Petrie Jr.
Director: Martin Brest

Back To The Future (1985)
Screenwriters: Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale
Director: Robert Zemeckis

Blade Runner (1982)
Screenwriters: Hampton Fancher and David Peoples
Based on the novel by Philip K. Dick
Director: Ridley Scott

The Blair Witch Project (1999)
Screenwriters: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez
Directors: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969)
Screenwriter: William Goldman
Director: George Roy Hill

The Butterfly Effect (2004)
Screenwriters: J. Mackye Gruber and Eric Bress
Directors: Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber

Chinatown (1974)
Screenwriter: Robert Towne
Director: Roman Polanski

Citizen Kane (1941)
Screenwriters: Herman Mankiewicz and Orson Welles
Director: Orson Welles

Coherence (2013)
Screenwriter: James Ward Byrkit
Director: James Ward Byrkit

Counter Clockwise (2016)
Screenwriters: Michael Kopelow and George Moise
Director: George Moise

Crazy Jones (2002)
Screenwriter: Joe Aaron
Director: Joe Aaron

Death Wish (1974)
Screenwriter: Wendell Mayes
Based on the novel by Brian Garfield
Director: Michael Winner

Die Hard (1988)
Screenwriters: Jeb Stuart and Steven E. de Souza
Based on the novel by Roderick Thorp
Director: John McTiernan

Dirty Harry (1971)
Screenwriters: Harry Julian Fink, Rita M. Fink and Dean Riesner
Director: Don Siegel

District 9 (2009)
Screenwriters: Neill Blomkamp and Terri Tatchell
Director: Neill Blomkamp

Down and Out in Beverly Hills (1986)
Screenwriters: Paul Mazursky and Leon Capetanos
Based on the play by Rene Fauchois
Director: Paul Mazursky

Edge of Tomorrow (2014)
Screenwriters: Christopher McQuarrie, Jez Butterworth and John-Henry Butterworth
Based on the novel by Hiroshi Sakurazaka
Director: Doug Liman

Elysium (2013)
Screenwriter: Neill Blomkamp
Director: Neill Blomkamp

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)
Screenwriter: Charlie Kaufman
Director: Michel Gondry

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982)
Screenwriter: Melissa Mathison
Director: Steven Spielberg

The Exorcist (1973)
Screenwriter: William Peter Blatty (based on his novel)
Director: William Friedkin

Fargo (1996)
Screenwriters: Ethan Coen and Joel Coen
Director: Joel Coen

Friday the Thirteenth (1980)
Screenwriter: Victor Miller
Director: Sean S. Cunningham

Groundhog Day (1993)
Screenwriters: Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis
Director: Harold Ramis

Harold and Maude (1971)
Screenwriter: Colin Higgins
Director: Hal Ashby

Inception (2010)
Screenwriter: Christopher Nolan
Director: Christopher Nolan

Independence Day (1996)
Screenwriters: Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich
Director: Roland Emmerich

Inherent Vice (2014)
Screenwriter: Paul Thomas Anderson
Based on the novel by Thomas Pynchon
Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

Iron Sky (2012)
Screenwriters: Michael Kalesniko and Timo Vuorensola
Director: Timo Vuorensola

Jaws (1975)
Screenwriters: Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb
Based on the novel by Peter Benchley
Director: Steven Spielberg

JFK (1991)
Screenwriters: Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar
Based on the books by Jim Garrison and Jim Marrs
Director: Oliver Stone

Jurassic Park (1993)
Screenwriters: Michael Crichton and David Koepp
Based on the novel by Michael Crichton
Director: Steven Spielberg

Jurassic World (2015)
Screenwriters: Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Colin Trevorrow and Derek Connolly
Director: Colin Trevorrow

Lipstick (1976)
Screenwriter: David Rayfiel
Director: Lamont Johnson

Logan's Run (1976)
Screenwriter: David Zelag Goodman
Based on the novel by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson
Director: Michael Anderson

Lost in Translation (2003)
Screenwriter: Sofia Coppola
Director: Sofia Coppola

The Man In The High Castle (2015-)
Television Series created by Frank Spotnitz
Based on the novel by Philip K. Dick

The Master (2012)
Screenwriter: Paul Thomas Anderson
Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

Memento (2000)
Screenwriter: Christopher Nolan
Based on the short story by Jonathan Nolan
Director: Christopher Nolan

Missing (1982)
Screenwriters: Costa-Gavras and Donald Stewart
Based on the book by Thomas Hauser
Director: Costa-Gavras

The Money Pit (1986)
Screenwriter: David Giler
Director: Richard Benjamin

Mulholland Drive (2001)
Screenwriter: David Lynch
Director: David Lynch

Muriel's Wedding (1994)
Screenwriter: Paul J. Hogan
Director: Paul J. Hogan

North By Northwest (1959)
Screenwriter: Ernest Lehman
Director: Alfred Hitchcock

Oblivion (2013)
Screenwriters: Karl Gajdusek and Michael beBruyn
Based on the graphic novel by Joseph Kosinski
Director: Joseph Kosinski

The Omega Man (1971)
Screenwriters: John William Corrington and Joyce H. Corrington
Based on the novel by Richard Matheson
Director: Boris Sagal

The Omen (1976)
Screenwriter: David Seltzer
Director: Richard Donner

Open Water (2003)
Screenwriter: Chris Kentis
Director: Chris Kentis

Paranormal Activity (2007)
Screenwriter: Oren Peli
Director: Oren Peli

Pi (1998)
Screenwriter: Darren Aronofsky
Director: Darren Aronofsky

Primer (2004)
Screenwriter: Shane Carruth
Director: Shane Carruth

Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
Screenwriter: Lawrence Kasdan
Story by George Lucas and Philip Kaufman
Director: Steven Spielberg

The Road Warrior (1981)
Screenwriters: Terry Hayes, George Miller and Brian Hannant
Director: George Miller

Safety Not Guaranteed (2012)
Screenwriter: Derek Connolly
Director: Colin Trevorrow

Separation City (2009)
Screenwriter: Tom Scott
Director: Paul Middleditch

Sideways (2004)
Screenwriters: Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor
Based on the novel by Rex Pickett
Director: Alexander Payne

Silent Running (1972)
Screenwriters: Deric Washburn, Mike Cimino and Steve Bochco
Director: Douglas Trumbull

Soylent Green (1973)
Screenwriter: Stanley R. Greenberg
Based on the novel by Harry Harrison
Director: Richard Fleisher

Spirited Away (2001)
Screenwriter: Hayao Miyazaki
Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Star Wars (Original Title) aka *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977)
Screenwriter: George Lucas
Director: George Lucas

Suspiria (1977)
Screenwriters: Dario Argento and Daria Nicolodi
Director: Dario Argento

Taken (2008)
Screenwriters: Luc Besson and Robert Mark Kamen
Director: Pierre Morel

Tender Mercies (1983)
Screenwriter: Horton Foote
Director: Bruce Beresford

Terminator (1984)
Screenwriters: James Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd
Director: James Cameron

Titanic (1997)
Screenwriter: James Cameron
Director: James Cameron

Tootsie (1982)
Screenwriters: Larry Gelbart and Murray Schisgal
Director: Sydney Pollack

Toy Story (1995)
Screenwriters: Joss Whedon, Andrew Stanton, Joel Cohen and Alec Sokolow
Director: John Lasseter

Transcendence (2014)
Screenwriter: Jack Paglen
Director: Wally Pfister

Unfinished Sky (2007)
Screenwriters: Peter Duncan and Kees van der Hulst
Director: Peter Duncan

The Verdict (1982)
Screenwriter: David Mamet
Based on the novel by Barry Reed
Director: Sidney Lumet

Wildcats (1986)
Screenwriter: Ezra Sacks
Director: Michael Ritchie

Witness (1985)
Screenwriters: Earl W. Wallace and William Kelley
Director: Peter Weir

The Wizard of Oz (1939)
Screenwriters: Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson and Edgar Allan Woolf
Based on the book by L. Frank Baum
Director: Victor Fleming

Wolf Creek (2005)
Screenwriter: Greg McLean
Director: Greg McLean

Z.P.G. (1972)
Screenwriters: Frank De Felitta and Max Ehrlich
Director: Michael Campus

APPENDIX A

Stephan Vladimir Bugaj's "pitch" for the film *Blade Runner*

Blade Runner is a future noir in which Deckard, an ex-cop once known for hunting rogue androids, is dragged out of retirement when a murderous group of military androids shows up in his city intent on forcing their designer to extend their short lifespans.

But what Deckard least expected was to fall in love with an android, Rachel, and as he hunts the rogues Deckard begins to question his own humanity, and theirs.

In his dogged pursuit Deckard drives away Rachel and is nearly killed by the dying rogue leader, Roy – but a moment of mutual empathy between man and android earns Deckard a second chance at a life and love.

APPENDIX B

Analysis of three recent high-budget science fiction films in relation to the screenwriting Model on Pages 34-35

OBLIVION (2013)

Screenwriters: Karl Gadjusek and Michael Arndt
Based on the graphic novel by Joseph Kosinski
Directed by Joseph Kosinski

Logline:
After decades of war with an alien race, Jack Harper is one of the last humans to remain on Earth but when he discovers a crashed spacecraft with a mysterious woman inside he starts to question everything he believed about his life.

Protagonist:
Jack Harper (Tom Cruise), a repairman whose job it is to fix the drones protecting Earth's remaining resources.

Protagonist's External Goal (and ending):
He *wants* the human race to survive. At the end of the film he is successful in destroying the aliens' spaceship.

Protagonist's Internal Goal (and ending):
He *needs* to find out who he really is. By the end of the film he has discovered he was once a pilot who was happily married to the woman he found in the crashed spacecraft but was captured by the aliens and his memory wiped. He ultimately sacrifices his own life to destroy the aliens. However, in the final scene we see one of his clones has survived on Earth and now makes contact with his wife.

Antagonist:
The extra-terrestrial aliens who want Earth's resources.

Three Act Structure:
The First Act establishes Jack's world; his "home" in orbit above the earth, his partner, and his job. The Second Act then focuses on his goal of wanting to fight the aliens in order to save humankind. The Third Act sees him travel to the alien spacecraft and destroy it with a nuclear bomb.

Inciting Incident:
Jack's discovery of a woman in a crash-landing module of a pre-war spacecraft.

First Plot Point:
Jack's discovery that he has been working on the side of the aliens, not the humans.

Mid-point:
Jack's discovery that there are other drone repairmen who are clones of himself.

Second Plot Point:
The drone the humans have armed with a nuclear weapon becomes inoperable, so Jack decides to transport it to the alien spaceship himself and then detonate it.

Controlling Idea:
What makes us human (Value) is our connection with Earth (Cause).

ELYSIUM (2013)

Screenwriter/Director: Neill Blomkamp

Logline:
In the year 2154, an ex-criminal must travel from an overpopulated Earth to a man-made space station where the rich now live in order to save himself from radiation poisoning.

Protagonist:
Max DeCosta (Matt Damon), a former car thief now on parole.

Protagonist's External Goal (and ending):
Since he was a young boy, Max has always *wanted* to go to Elysium, the huge space station where the rich now live. After the first Plot Point this desire turns into a

necessity as he will die if he doesn't go there. In the last act of the film he travels to Elysium.

Protagonist's Internal Goal (and ending):
In order to survive in a harsh world, Max has learnt to always look out for number one. He *needs* to be become less self-centred. At the end of the film he makes a self-less decision to sacrifice himself to save a little girl's life. In doing so, he makes the world a better place.

Antagonist:
The rogue sleeper agent on Earth whose role it is to stop non-authorised people travelling to Elysium. In the climax of the film, Max kills this agent.

Three Act Structure:
The First Act sets up the world of the poor on earth and the world of the rich on Elysium, as well as the protagonist and his external and internal goal. The Second Act focuses on his desperate attempts to get to Elysium by returning to his criminal past. The Third Act is then set on Elysium when Max travels there after confronting the antagonist.

Inciting Incident:
As a young boy, Max looks up at Elysium and promises to take his girlfriend there one day.

First Plot Point:
Max accidentally receives a lethal dose of radiation and is told he only has five days to live. He now has to go to Elysium where they have the technology to cure him.

Mid-point:
This is Max's first encounter with the antagonist who kills his friend and tries to kill him.

Second Plot Point:
Max is able to force the antagonist to take him to Elysium. This then leads to the Third Act climax and resolution on Elysium.

Controlling Idea:
A better world (Value) can be achieved by breaking down the divide between rich and poor (Cause).

EDGE OF TOMORROW (2014)

Screenwriters: Christopher McQuarrie, Jez Butterworth and John-Henry Butterworth
Based on the novel by Hiroshi Sakurazaka
Directed by Doug Liman

Logline:
A self-centred Major in the media relations department of the United Defense Force is forced to become a combat soldier fighting an alien invasion when he enters a time-loop reliving the same suicide mission over and over again.

Protagonist:
Major William Cage (Tom Cruise), an officer who has never seen a day of combat.

Protagonist's External Goal (and ending):
He *wants* to save the world from an alien invasion. At the end he sacrifices his life to destroy the alien controlling the attack, thereby saving the world. But he then time travels back to the day before and makes contact with the woman he has fallen in love with.

Protagonist's Internal Goal (and ending):
He *needs* to be less self-centred. He achieves this at the end when he sacrifices himself to save the world.

Antagonists:
The alien invaders.

Three Act Structure:
The First Act sets up Cage as the main character and a Special Forces warrior, Vrataski (Emily Blunt), as the co-lead. The world is at war after an alien attack and he is asked to join a massive invasion against alien-occupied territory in France. The Second Act then focuses on his efforts to become combat skilled in order to defeat the enemy. The Third Act then sees him and Vrataski lead a special unit in an attack on the hiding place of the head alien.

Inciting Incident:
For refusing to join the invasion, Cage is arrested and forced to join a combat unit as one of their soldiers in the attack.

First Plot Point:
Cage is killed in the invasion but alien blood covers his wounds and he travels back in time to the day before the attack. Every time he is then killed, he goes back in time one day.

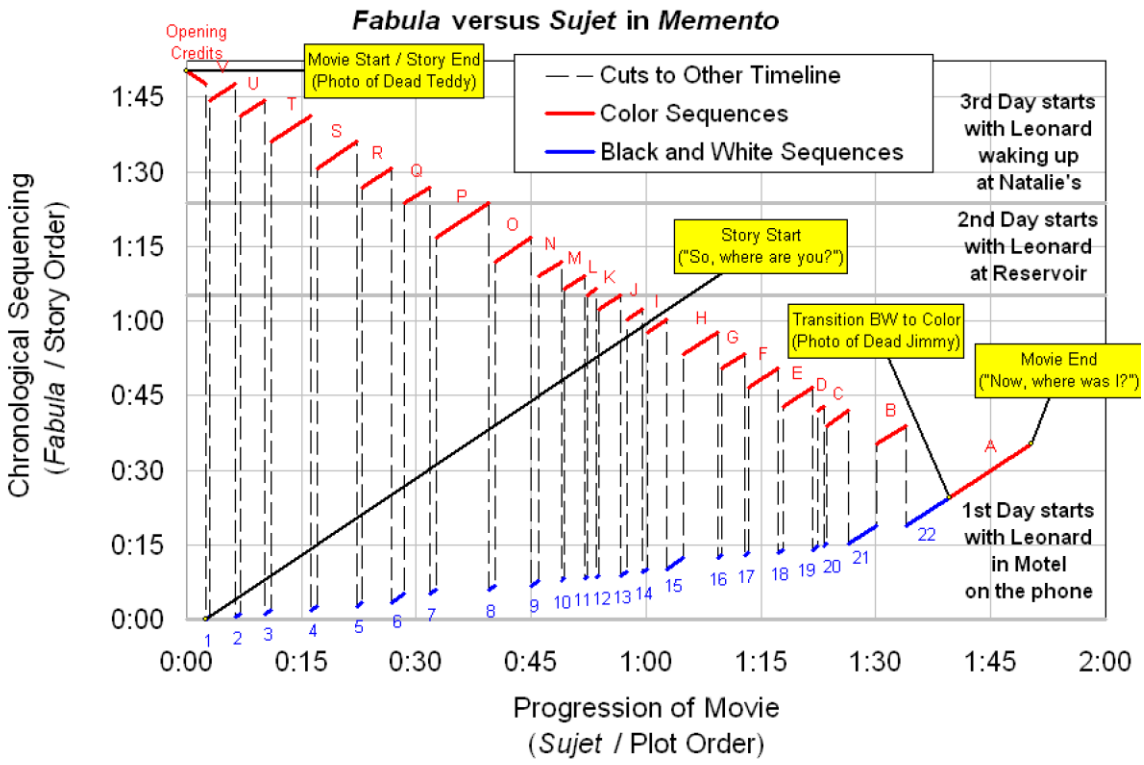
Mid-point:
Cage and Vrataski have become quite close as they relive the same day over and over again, steadily progressing closer to their goal of reaching the head alien, but they get to a point which Vrataski never gets past. Cage goes on without her but then gives up, believing the fight is pointless.

Second Plot Point:
Cage has decided to continue the fight but is injured and now receives a blood transfusion. This means the next time he's killed, he won't go back in time (i.e. he will die forever). He bravely decides to continue his mission to stop the aliens. (Note: In the climax of the film he dies but still goes back in time when he is again covered in alien blood.)

Controlling Idea:
To achieve your goal (Value) you must never give in (Cause).

APPENDIX C

Diagram representing Plot v Story of *Memento*



Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/Memento_Timeline.png